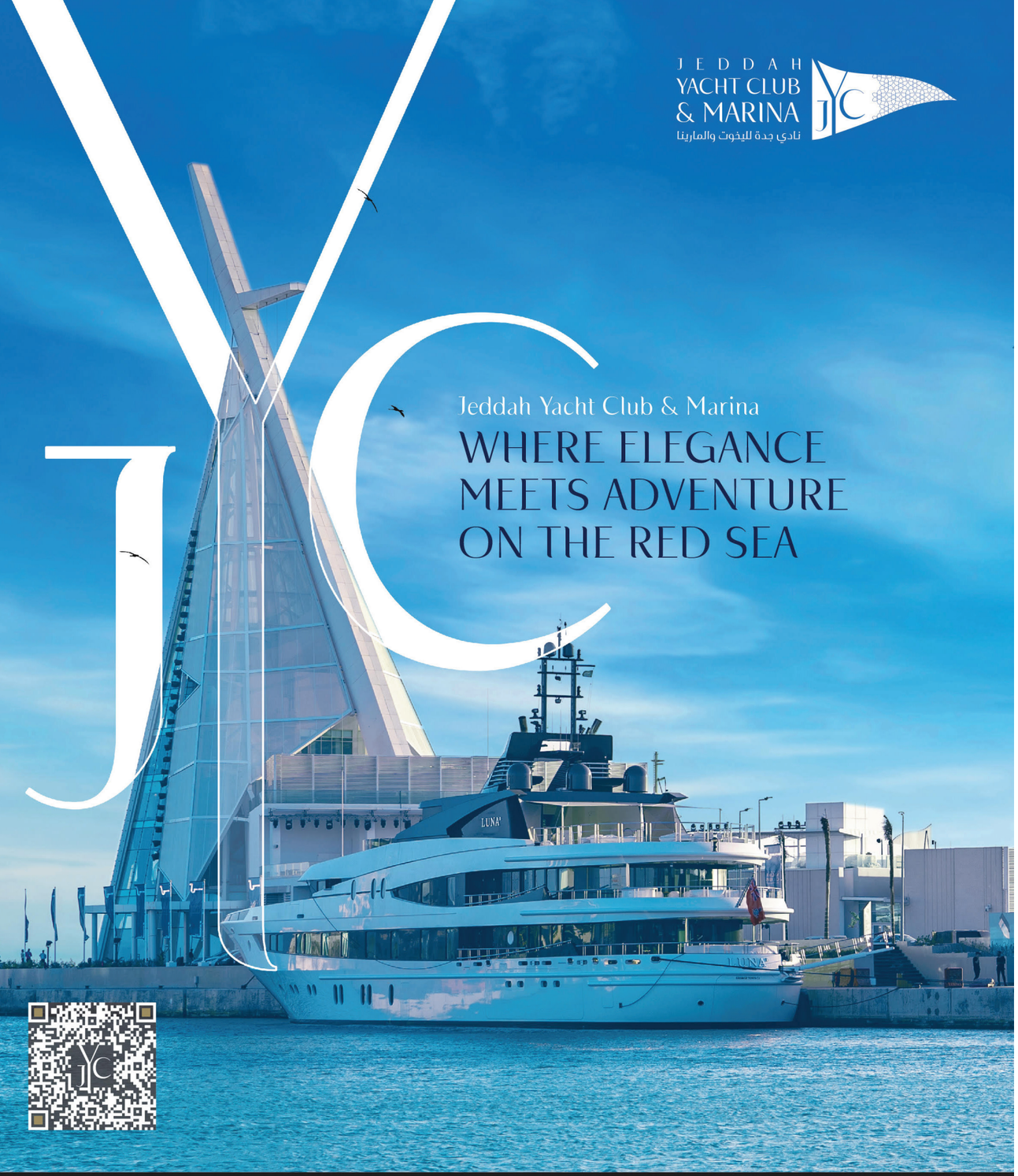
THE RING
THE NEW ALL-TIME GREAT OLEKSANDR USYK
2024 FIGHTER OF THE YEAR
USYK
KING
GOD'S WARRIOR



BOXING'S BIG NIGHT
THE RING'S YEAR-END AWARDS CEREMONY IN LONDON

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COVER ILLUSTRATION BY VLADISLAV LAKSHE

OPENING SHOTS

Ye Joon Kim saved the date when he boldly stepped in to face undisputed junior featherweight champ Naoya Inoue after Sam Goodman pulled out of his mandatory challenge just 11 days prior to the January 24 Tokyo event, but the unheralded South Korean couldn't save himself from a fourth-round KO after bravely (some would say foolishly) daring Japan's premier fighter to hit him in the face.

Naoki Fukuda

OPENING SHOTS

Hardscrabble Japanese strawweight champ Yuni Takada (left) landed enough power shots like this one against Goki Kobayashi to narrowly edge his domestic rival by 12-round split decision on the Inoue-Kim undercard.

Naoki Fukuda

COME OUT WRITING

On Our Cover:

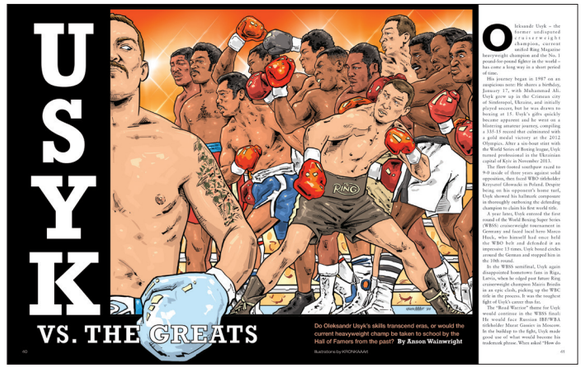
The artist who created this month's cover image of 2024 Fighter of the Year Oleksandr Usyk is Vladislav Lakshe:

"I am an artist from Europe who has dreamed of uniting sports and art since childhood. Combining my passion for basketball and painting, I created the concept of 'Basketball Art,' described by Nike as 'inspiring the world.'

"After graduating from the Art Academy, I began designing visuals for tournaments, motivational T-shirts, and major sports events. One of the highlights of my career was collaborating with the NBA to create artwork for the Toronto Raptors during their championship season. I also co-founded a street sports tournament that has run for 17 years and has become an iconic event celebrating basketball, football and other games. I'm a boxing fan as well, drawing inspiration from legends like Muhammad Ali.

"I aspire to organize a grand exhibition to showcase my achievements and create a masterpiece I can truly be proud of. For me, sports and art are humanity's greatest gifts: One heals the body, the other the soul, and together, they inspire greatness."

You can contact Vladislav via vladlakshe@gmail.com or Instagram @lakshepassion.



Glad You Like It!

Is this going to be the new Ring Magazine? If so, sign me up for a lifetime subscription – as long as the $$$$$$$ are not too much! LOL! Everything about it is great. Much praise to his Excellency Turki Alalshikh for bringing the Bible Of Boxing back where it belongs: in the hands of devoted boxing fans.

Kenneth Domonkos
Fountain Inn, South Carolina

I was so excited to receive the December 2024 issue. I have been a Ring reader since the early 1980s. I can't wait to see what 2025 brings!

Stephen Ripa
Stratford, NJ

Fury Vs. The Greatest

Thank you so much for publishing the New Ring Magazine. Cover to cover, it was great. I just read a few articles a day so I could savor the magazine. I really liked Anson Wainwright's article, "Usyk vs. The Greats." For the most part, it was right on the money.

Now, what I am about to write will be very unpopular with many boxing fans. From Floyd Patterson to Oleksandr Usyk, I have watched all these heavyweight champions box (title and non-title bouts). There is no doubt in my mind that the pre-1974 Muhammad Ali (with the exception of Joe Frazier) would defeat those champions. However, I think the post-1974 Ali would be beaten by Tyson Fury. I am not writing that Fury is a better boxer than Ali and most certainly would have been defeated by the pre-1974 Ali, hands down. Ali used the rope-a-dope to tire out and defeat Foreman, but in a fight with Fury, the rope-a-dope would not work. When Ali would lay on the ropes, Fury would not punch; he would just lean on Ali and force the referee to break, which would then get Ali tired. I believe that Fury would win on points. And do not forget that the post-1974 Ali lost to Leon Spinks.

Walter Zabicki
Holly Ridge, NC

Editor's response: It's a brave position to take, Walter – and by brave we mean that you're on your own if you decide to claim at the next IBHOF induction weekend that Fury would beat Ali. But seriously, one sticking point is that your mythical matchup assumes that Ali would bust out the rope-a-dope for a fight against Fury. But it's unlikely that he would, given that Fury and Foreman are so different in style and temperament. And even if he decided to try it and didn't get the desired effect, one has to assume he'd try something else. And many thought that Usyk's undoing would be Fury leaning on him, but the Ukrainian master nullified that threat with brains and skills. The post-1974 Ali was still pretty smart and skillful. So while we cannot concur with your pick, what's certain is that the press conferences preceding an Ali-Fury fight would be among the most entertaining events in boxing history.

Something For The Collectors

As a lifelong collector and subscriber I have a suggestion: Now that you're back on the print editions, maybe The Ring should produce a poster containing all the covers that weren't put into print between 2023-2024. It would be a bit of a collector's item for those loyal souls. I think it might be a good seller via your shop, or good initiative as an insert in a future print issue. I know similar things have been done in the past. One really good outcome is it would further honor Dmitry Bivol and Naoya Inoue as your Fighters of the Year for 2022 and 2023, respectively. Keep up the good work and keep healthy.

Robert Harding
Kent, U.K.

Write To The Ring!

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February 2025

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RINGSIDE By Doug Fischer

We're Just Getting Started

Attendees of the awards ceremony in London included a full spectrum of boxing luminaries.

The Ring ended 2024 with influential new ownership, a triumphant return to print, a star-studded relaunch gala in Saudi Arabia and bold promises of bigger and better things to come.

Less than a month after the celebration in Riyadh, one of the new owner's ideas came to lavish fruition with the inaugural Ring Magazine awards ceremony in London on January 11. The event – held at the Old Royal Naval College, a 300-year-old historical landmark in Greenwich – brought a level of opulence and elegance on par with the Academy Awards to the boxing world.

The best fighters, highlights and events of 2024 were honored with grand sophistication, and it came as no surprise that the cover star of this issue took home more awards than any other individual boxer.

Reigning Ring Magazine heavyweight champ **Oleksandr Usyk** was the clear choice for Fighter of the Year (his second time winning the most prestigious of the annual awards), for his back-to-back victories over Tyson Fury. The veteran southpaw, who recently celebrated his 38th birthday, also collected awards for Round of the Year (for his thrilling ninth-round drubbing of Fury in their first tussle) and Event of the Year (headlined by bout No. 1, which briefly crowned Usyk the first undisputed heavyweight king in 25 years).

Other notable winners include **Gabriela Fundora** (the Female Fighter of the Year, who became the first undisputed women's flyweight champion at age 22), **Raymond Ford** (who won the Fight of the Year with his dramatic 12th-round stoppage of Otabek Kholmatov), **Daniel Dubois** (who scored the Knockout of the Year with his brutal fifth-round demolition of Anthony Joshua), **Billy Dib** (whose final professional bout – staged after his victory over cancer – was deemed the Comeback of the Year), **Bruno Surace** (who won the Upset of the Year with

his shocking sixth-round KO of Jaime Munguia), and **Moses Itauma** (the just-turned 20-year-old heavyweight sensation who took home the Prospect of the Year award).

Congratulations to all of the 2024 award winners and to the other nominees. As I stated in my brief speech before the awards were announced, these fighters and events are the boxing legends and lore of the future.

However, the boxers and industry luminaries that converged upon London for the exclusive ceremony weren't just there to hobnob and conduct interviews on the red carpet. Many of the sport's top talents and attractions that were present – including **Canelo Alvarez, Terence Crawford, Teofimo Lopez, Shakur Stevenson, Devin Haney** and **Ryan Garcia** – weren't even award nominees.

They were there to do business and cut deals with the owner of this fine publication, all of which led to exciting news during the first month of 2025.

As we went to press, the following matchups were either rumored to be near finalization or had been announced:

- **Chris Eubank Jr. vs. Conor Benn**, a done deal for April 26 at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in London. I know this grudge match may not move the needle that much in the U.S., but imagine if one of Oscar De La Hoya's sons boxed professionally and took on one of Fernando Vargas' three fighting sons (preferably Emiliano). Now amp that buzz to 11 and you'll have an idea of the crossover interest Eubank-Benn will have in the U.K. (There's a reason it landed in a freakin' stadium!) The rivalry between their fathers – Chris Eubank and Nigel Benn – invigorated British boxing during the early 1990s. And the sons genuinely hate each other as much as their dads did. This middleweight showdown will be the first of many events presented by The Ring in collaboration with SNK Games' "Fatal Fury: City of Wolves" (an anime-stylized fighting game).
- **Ryan Garcia** and **Devin Haney** co-headlining an outdoor event at New York City's Times Square in May. Haney will take on former unified junior welterweight beltholder Jose Ramirez in a non-title bout, while Garcia is slated to face Rolando "Rolly" Romero. This will be the second Ring Magazine/SNK Games-branded event and the first on U.S. soil. Both bouts will likely be contested a few pounds above the junior welterweight limit, and if Haney and Garcia are victorious, they have reportedly agreed to an October rematch of their controversial 12-round "no-contest."
- **Canelo Alvarez vs. Terence Crawford** for Alvarez's Ring Magazine super middleweight championship and unified alphabet titles in September. This matchup of two future first-ballot hall of famers is undoubtedly the biggest potential event of 2025 (at least in North America). It will most likely happen on the 13th (the Saturday before Mexican Independence Day) and

A history-making event in Times Square could be followed by a second Garcia-Haney clash.

Chris Esqueda/Golden Boy

land at the T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas. Canelo is expected to fight on May 3 (the Saturday of Cinco De Mayo weekend) possibly against William Scull, holder of the IBF belt that was stripped from Alvarez last year. It's not known if Crawford, who currently holds the WBA 154-pound title, will take an interim bout as well.

- **Teofimo Lopez vs. Richardson Hitchins** (and then **Jaron Ennis**, and then maybe the winner of Garcia-Haney II). OK, this potential three-bout deal with the Ring Magazine/WBO 140-pound champ is still being worked out and, clearly, a lot of things have to happen to see it play out. However, both Lopez and his promoter, Bob Arum, have stated on record that they like this ambitious plan set forth by His Excellency. The first leg, expected to take place this summer, is risky. Hitchins, The Ring's No. 4-rated junior welterweight and undefeated holder of the IBF strap, is the kind of stick-and-move stylist that has troubled Lopez in the past. But if Lopez were to defeat Hitchins, a showdown with Ennis – slated for October (and contingent upon The Ring's No. 1-rated welterweight besting No. 2-rated **Eimantas Stanionis** for the vacant Ring Magazine championship on April 12) – would be one of the most anticipated all-American matchups of the year. If Lopez were to get by Ennis (and that's a very big "if") he would face the winner of the other anticipated all-American matchup, Garcia-Haney II, in February 2026.

But of all of the news that followed the awards gala, what piqued my interest the most is a proposed title unification bout between unbeaten Ring Magazine/IBF cruiserweight champ **Jai Opetaia** and The Ring's No. 1-rated 200-pounder, WBA/WBO beltholder **Gilberto Ramirez**. The matchup was mentioned as part of a "5 vs. 5" showdown between Eddie Hearn's **Matchroom Boxing** and Oscar De La Hoya's **Golden Boy Promotions**. If you recall, last year's inaugural "5 vs. 5" event resulted in Sir Eddie's quintet losing 0-5 to domestic rival Frank Warren's **Queensberry Promotions** team, but Matchroom's deep roster is thought to have a decided edge against Golden Boy's stable of fighters. I'm not so sure about that, but this latest tournament – tentatively scheduled for June – has the wannabe-matchmaker portion of my brain churning.

Here's the lineup that I want to see (main event up top, Matchroom fighters to the left):

1. **Jai Opetaia vs. Gilberto Ramirez** – This all-southpaw clash pits Opetaia's explosive athleticism vs. Zurdo's experience, technique and workrate. Both have granite chins, so we can expect a world-class battle of attrition that rages into the championship rounds.
2. **Shakur Stevenson vs. William Zepeda** – Like most fans and media, I expect Stevenson to successfully defend his WBC 135-pound title against Floyd Schofield on February 22. "Kid Austin" is a brash but still-developing prospect. Zepeda is a grown-ass man and a legit top-five lightweight contender (No. 4 according to The Ring). This is a classic boxer/technician vs. pressure fighter/volume puncher matchup. The Mexico-vs.-USA rivalry conjures images of Julio Cesar Chavez vs. Frankie Randall, Marco Antonio Barrera vs. Kennedy McKinney and Jose Luis Castillo vs. Floyd Mayweather Jr. in my mind.
3. **Jack Catterall vs. Oscar Duarte** – This 140-pound matchup is contingent upon Catterall defeating Arnold Barboza and Duarte beating Regis Prograis (both bouts take place on February 15). If victorious (and both are the odds favorites), I'd love to be treated to another boxer (Catterall)-vs.-scrapper (Duarte) matchup.
4. **Diego Pacheco vs. Bektemir Melikuziev** – Pacheco, who's about as well-rounded as one can expect a 23-year-old to be, continues to climb the 168-pound rankings (currently top five in The Ring, WBO, WBC and IBF ratings). Melikuziev, who's 8-0 since getting KTFO by Gabriel Rosado in 2021, has not been able to rekindle the buzz he had prior to his lone loss, when he was known as "Bek the Bully." However, the 28-year-old Uzbek remains a dangerous fringe contender and has the kind of reckless offensive style that could bring the best out of the sometimes lackadaisical Pacheco.
5. **Ishmael Davis vs. Charles Conwell** – It says here that Davis is the best junior middleweight currently on a two-bout losing streak. Last year, the 29-year-old stylist from Leeds dropped a 12-round majority decision to Josh Kelly and was stopped after going six rounds with Serhii Bohachuk, but he took both bouts on very short notice (less than two weeks) and was still competitive. I'd like to see what Davis can do with a full camp. I'd also like to see Conwell – my choice as the darkhorse of the very deep 154-pound division – remain active (The Ring's No. 8 contender is 3-0 with 3 KOs since signing with Golden Boy last year), showcasing his considerable talent and skill while waiting for his deserved title shot.

Just my opinion, but I don't think either promotional company will sweep this tournament. It will be close enough – and more importantly, entertaining enough – for fans to demand a 5 vs. 5 rematch.

The main event for that one should be **Vergil Ortiz Jr.** (should he get by the skilled and dangerous Israil Madrimov on February 22) vs. Ennis (again, if "Boots" is successful against Stanionis).

But I'm getting ahead of myself, aren't I?

What's currently on the schedule is more than enough to start 2025 off with a bang.

IS THERE HOPE?

By Steve Kim

Fighters define eras. Eras define fighters. And it's the fights that should frame how we look at any particular era of boxing. Case in point: My formative years – growing up in Valencia and then Montebello, California – were during the 1980s. So when I think of boxing – while many conjure up images of "Iron" Mike Tyson – for me, this decade was ruled by "the Four Kings."

Sugar Ray Leonard, Marvin Hagler, Thomas Hearns and Roberto Duran were the signature boxers in my view.

From 1980 to 1989, they engaged in a series of bouts that not only generated millions of dollars for themselves, but wrote a vital piece of boxing history as well. Perhaps even more importantly, they created a generation of fans that help sustain the business to this day.

So far, Gervonta Davis, Devin Haney, Ryan Garcia and Teofimo Lopez have only combined for two bouts.

The word "iconic" comes to mind when you think of these four hall of famers and some of the battles they had. From 1980 (beginning with Duran handing Leonard his first professional defeat) to their admittedly forgettable third clash in 1989, there were nine fights involving these titans of the ring.

It's why a couple of bouts from their classic round-robin were highlighted in the highly acclaimed *Legendary Nights* series on HBO during the 2000s. More recently, Showtime featured the four fighters' intertwined careers in a four-part 2021 documentary simply titled *The Kings*. Several books, including *Four Kings*, penned by the late, great George Kimball, have been written about their storied battles with one another.

Which brings us to this generation. What do we make of Gervonta Davis, Ryan Garcia, Devin Haney and Teofimo Lopez? It was around 2020 when you started seeing homemade graphics and memes floating around social media depicting them – all basically lightweights at the time – as the modern-day version of the above-mentioned foursome.

They were young, talented, marketable and had their own sect of dedicated fan bases to rely upon. This would be the quartet that would be the foundation of the 2020s for the boxing industry. So, as we cross into the halfway mark of the decade, are they holding up their end of the bargain?

Well, as this is being written, there have only been two fights involving any of these guys – both involving Garcia. "KingRy" was run over by "Tank" Davis in seven rounds in 2023, and last year his points victory over Haney (where he scored three knockdowns) was overturned after he tested positive for the banned substance ostarine. He was suspended by the New York State Athletic Commission for one year from the date of that contest (April 20).

Keep this in mind: When Leonard and Hearns engaged in their initial battle in 1981, Leonard was 25 years old and Hearns was just over a month shy of his 23rd birthday. This current group ranges from 26 (Garcia and Haney) to 30 (Davis). They are entering their physical primes. But what do they say about youth being wasted on the young?

Last year, these four engaged in a grand total of five fights.

The reality is that it's too much to ask these guys to be what the "Kings" were, or what even Manny Pacquiao, Erik Morales, Juan Manuel Marquez and Marco Antonio Barrera were to their generation. Forget about the likes of Roman Gonzalez, Juan Francisco Estrada, Carlos Cuadras and Srisaket Sor Rungvisai, too.

The business and game of boxing has changed, and unfortunately, so have the fighters. They aren't as active and are therefore not as seasoned – and they are not nearly as recognizable to the general public as their predecessors. They don't even seem as relatable as boxers of the past. Leonard, Hagler, Duran and Hearns would regularly leave us in awe. The modern day "star" is more likely to make the public cringe with their antics.

The Four Kings' rivalry was cover-worthy throughout the 1980s.

It's not really a knock on them but the reality of the current culture we live in.

Social media can only do so much in the guise of building up personal brands. Many moments go viral, but how many are truly unforgettable? For decades, boxing created legends. Now it creates a generation of forgettable fighters who amuse us at times but fail to truly leave an indelible mark on our souls.

Maybe I'm being a bit too harsh on this current crop. Admittedly, I am getting more cynical in my old age. There is a chance that these still-young men are not perpetrators of the current marketplace, but merely products of it.

But there seems to be some hope as we head into 2025. While the year began with a lawsuit between Haney and Garcia, stemming from their bout last year, it looks like they're headed to a rematch in the second half of the year. It was formally announced on January 20 that those two will co-headline a May card in Times Square in New York City as a prelude to their second meeting, which could land in October.

Garcia will take on Rolando Romero, while Haney will face former unified junior welterweight champion Jose Ramirez. While some may prefer for this second chapter to take place immediately, the reality is that neither have been in the ring since last April.

As for the perennially disgruntled Lopez, who has a love-hate relationship with his promoter, Top Rank, the word is that he has signed a multi-fight agreement with Turki Alalshikh and his organization. This path could see him face Richardson Hitchins in a junior welterweight unification battle in the spring. Then a bout with The Ring's No. 1-rated welterweight, IBF beltholder Jaron "Boots" Ennis, culminating with Lopez eventually facing the winner of Garcia-Haney II.

As for Tank, he is scheduled to face Lamont Roach on March 1. He seems content in playing by himself in the PBC sandbox for the time being.

But overall, there seems to be some activity and action taking place amongst this group. Maybe in a few years, they will define this decade, and not be the problem with it. RING

Davis/Garcia: Al Bello; Haney: Cris Esqueda/Golden Boy; Lopez: Jamie Squire;

BERNSTEIN ON BOXING

YES, IT'S SPECIAL

By Al Bernstein

Oleksandr Usyk's rematch victory over Tyson Fury is among the high points of this heavyweight era.

Before I was on television, I wrote for Boxing Illustrated in the late 1970s. I wrote about the period of transition from the heavyweight division dominated by Muhammad Ali, Joe Frazier and George Foreman to the one that Larry Holmes would lead in the 1980s. In that period, I was able to chronicle great fights involving Holmes, Kenny Norton, Earnie Shavers, Jimmy Young and others. It was a remarkable time for the heavyweights. Before that, I was simply a fan of the division dating back to the late 1950s, when I was a 9-year-old listening to the Floyd Patterson-Ingemar Johansson fights on my transistor radio. So I go back a little with the heavyweight division.

Now here we are, so many years later in the aftermath of the historically important and well-fought rematch between Oleksandr Usyk and Tyson Fury. Usyk's win cemented his place in boxing folklore as a ring great while doing no real harm to Fury's legacy as a major heavyweight in this era and beyond. The fight also demonstrated that the big names of this era are still capable of producing exciting and important fights, though they are clearly in the twilight of their boxing careers. This seems like the appropriate moment in time to assess this exciting period in heavyweight history.

I'll define this as the post-Klitschko era, even though Wladimir Klitschko did participate in two of the fights that spawned two of the superstars of this era. Klitschko's 2015 loss to Tyson Fury ended his long title reign and announced Fury's arrival at the championship level. Then his thrilling loss to Anthony Joshua in 2017 seemed to validate Joshua as a heavyweight champion. So the torch was truly passed in those two fights. Unlike the period before that, when the Klitschko name (including brother Vitali) seemed to control heavyweight boxing, this ushered in an era where multiple men held titles and shared the limelight.

In this current era, to this point, we have not seen two of the biggest matches fans yearned for – Fury vs. Joshua or Joshua vs. Deontay Wilder. Since boxing fans are often by nature a "glass half-empty" group, one could imagine many seeing this era as a disappointment. That assessment would be true if you based it only on this small set of facts. By any other standard, however, I think this era of heavyweight boxing has been fun, exciting and filled with drama of all kinds. You notice my choice of words; I did not say it was filled with the greatest heavyweights of all time. As a fan, then chronicler of a number of heavyweight eras, I am reticent about going that far, though I won't scoff at others who want to take that leap. I can say for sure, however, that we have seen plenty of excellence from boxers in this era.

So what does it take for an era to qualify as special? Here are some essential elements.

1. A LARGER-THAN-LIFE FIGURE

It was not a popular stance 15 years ago to suggest Tyson Fury would be a force in the heavyweight division. I am no sage, and I'm sure I have been wrong just as much as I have been right, but on THIS one, I am on the right side of history. I was on the Fury bandwagon as early as 2010. I announced a ShoBox show in which Fury won by decision vs. Richie Power. It was not an impressive win, but I felt strongly that his physical advantages, potentially good jab and fearless approach to the sport would lead him to success. I chronicled much of his march to contention while announcing his fights on Channel 5, the over-the-air network in the U.K. I saw him get better and win some important matches, like his first big win over Derek Chisora in 2011. It was pretty lonely on the Fury bandwagon back in those days, but, like him, I stayed the course.

"Larger than life" describes Fury inside and outside the ring. He has provided us with wildly exciting moments inside the ring with Wilder, Usyk and others, a spectacular fall from grace due to substance abuse and mental health issues, and a remarkable comeback from those circumstances. Add into the mix controversial statements that sometimes come under the category of showmanship and other times are simply tasteless and even cruel. And factor in that he is capable of a kind of roguish charm that includes singing full songs (in tune, no less) in the ring right after getting hit in the head for 12 rounds by a big heavyweight. The whole package is head-spinning when you look back on it. So check off "larger-than-life figure" for this era.

2. A GENERATIONAL FIGHTER

In 1988, Evander Holyfield had completely conquered the cruiserweight division and moved to heavyweight. He would win the undisputed crown in his new division by beating Buster Douglas in 1990. He went on to become a great champion and provided us with thrilling moments in that era of heavyweights. That had not been done before and remained a singular feat until Usyk traveled the Holyfield highway to do it again in THIS era of heavyweights.

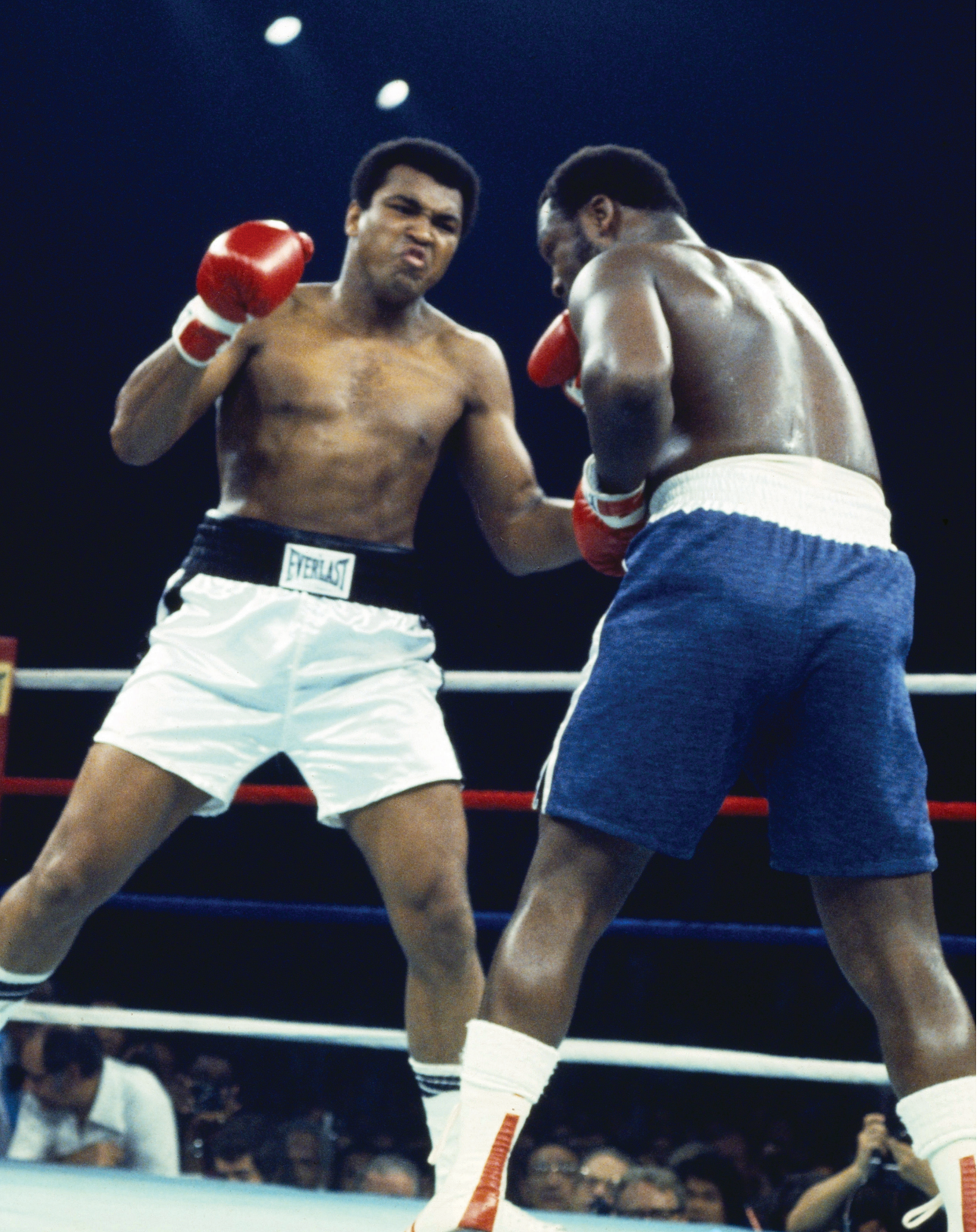
It is almost impossible to overstate what Usyk has accomplished. First he ran the gauntlet in a VERY talented cruiserweight division by fighting top contenders and other beltholders in THEIR home territories to unify titles. Then he became a heavyweight and within five years became the undisputed champion. His opponents in eight of his last 10 bouts, covering two weight divisions, have been former, current or future world titleholders. Since winning his first cruiserweight title, most of his opposition has been world class, and as a heavyweight he's faced bigger opposition. He has won with guile and boxing skills and combination punching. That said, let's not forget that in his first fight with Fury, it was he, the former cruiserweight, who almost stopped the big heavyweight – not the other way around. You can look at his career eight ways from Sunday and it always adds up to being an astonishing run. His win in the Fury rematch put an exclamation mark on it. Generational fighter? This era has one.

3. AN ENIGMA

The definition of enigma is: "A person or thing that is mysterious, puzzling, difficult to understand." Every important heavyweight era has had a meaningful fighter who was an enigmatic figure. For this era, Anthony Joshua, please raise your hand. Joshua and his epic ups and downs have been a dramatic part of this fascinating era – a part that has added plenty of intrigue.

Since Joshua won his first title in 2016, he has drawn historic crowds, made consistently huge paydays, won and lost world titles and constantly surprised us at every turn. It isn't just his wins and losses. Yes, we were shocked when he lost to Andy Ruiz and perhaps somewhat too surprised when he lost to Usyk the first time. He further surprised us, in a positive way, by knocking out Francis Ngannou after Fury had failed to hurt the debutant boxer and nearly lost to him. So the results of his fights are often puzzling, but beyond that is the manner in which he wins or loses that frequently befuddles us. He came back to defeat Ruiz in their rematch with

Fury: Julian Finney; Usyk: Francois Nel; Joshua: Al Bello. Anadolu



Ali: Bettmann; Fury: Al Bello

pure boxing that bordered on timidity. Against Usyk, when most would have expected him to use his power and size against an undersized opponent, he continued to be a technician and not an attacker. Then, against Daniel Dubois, he took TOO MANY chances when he had Dubois hurt, and that led to his downfall.

He has provided this era with some of the most exciting rounds in recent heavyweight history, and yet also some of the most frustratingly subdued performances we've seen from a major heavyweight figure. It has all been fascinating to watch as he draws huge live crowds and some very large pay-per-view audiences. We all have tried to solve the puzzle that is Anthony Joshua. His excellence and frailty have given this era a genuine enigma. Check that one off, too.

Muhammad Ali (here in his third fight against Joe Frazier) satisfied all four categories on his own.

4. A GREAT TRILOGY

The Muhammad Ali-Joe Frazier and Evander Holyfield-Riddick Bowe trilogies were centerpieces of those respective heavyweight eras and added immeasurably to them being special. The Tyson Fury-Deontay Wilder trilogy does the same for this era.

Wilder, the fourth main spoke in the wheel of this heavyweight era, is an imperfect power-puncher. With a late start in boxing, he could never quite figure out how to have his technique catch up with his power. Still, he became a champion, a star in the sport, and he participated in one of the exciting heavyweight trilogies of all time.

I announced the first Fury-Wilder fight in 2018. While the action was not nonstop, the atmosphere was tense and electric as we all wondered when Wilder's power would show up and hurt Fury. We got our answer in Round 9 when Fury was sent to the canvas. But he survived, and Wilder was a bit fatigued and not able to follow up in that round or the next two. In the 12th (another round controlled by Fury, as almost all were in the fight), Wilder landed the perfect right hand, the kind that had always stopped his opponents. That's when I witnessed the single most surprising thing I have seen in over 40 years of announcing fights. I saw Fury lay motionless on the canvas for about five seconds and then rise like Lazarus, with his 6-foot-9 frame seemingly getting up in sections, to the astonishment of every single person in that arena. He even finished the round stronger than Wilder. It ended as a controversial draw, and Fury's survival of that knockdown became boxing folklore.

For fight number two in 2020, Fury raised eyebrows by weighing in at 273 pounds, one of his highest weights to that point. He proclaimed before the fight that the extra weight was so he could bully Wilder – he said he would face the power head-on with his own strength. Most folks didn't believe Fury would try to execute that plan. Not only did he do it – it worked perfectly. He was able to stop Wilder in Round 7 of the most one-sided fight of their trilogy.

Fight three in 2021 produced one of the two most thrilling heavyweight fights I've viewed in person. The other was the 1978 match between Larry Holmes and Kenny Norton. They provided 15 scintillating rounds highlighted by a 15th round that remains one of the best in heavyweight history. With the fight on the line, they battled to the end, and Holmes gained a razor-thin victory. I sat there that June afternoon at Caesars Palace and thought that I may never again be present for a heavyweight fight this exciting. Well, 43 years later, I was. Fury-Wilder 3 was destined to be a brawl. Both men wanted a conclusive ending to the fight. Fury sent Wilder down in the third round and it looked like it might be a replay of the second fight, with Fury just having his way. In the very next round, however, Wilder hit Fury with a right hand that would have knocked out anyone and should have created a knockout on that night. But, hey, this was Tyson Fury, and he just won't allow himself to be knocked out. He beat the count, did so again after another knockdown just before the bell, and for several more rounds they exchanged big punches, with Fury doing most of the damage. Then Fury created a violent and destructive ending for Wilder in the 11th. The arena that night was alive with excitement. The courage and grit displayed in the ring that night by both men was something that would be hard to ever forget. So, yes, this era had a great trilogy.

There have been many more exciting fights in this division involving the likes of Daniel Dubois, Joe Joyce, Dillian Whyte, Zhilei Zhang, Joseph Parker, Luis Ortiz and Derek Chisora, who never met a brawl he didn't like. A division that some believed to be moribund 12 years ago came alive with three, then four big stars and a supporting cast of good fighters. They all collectively ended up creating a lot of fun for the fans. It is possible that they have milked the last huge fight out of this era with the two Usyk-Fury extravaganzas, but I wouldn't bet on it. Still, we know the landscape is close to changing, and we will be left to simply reminisce about this group of heavyweight stars that gave us so many excellent memories in a decade's time. I, for one, will enjoy the reminiscing. RING

Hall of Fame broadcaster Al Bernstein has been the voice of boxing on ESPN, then Showtime. He now announces the Big Time Boxing USA series on DAZN and hosts his own YouTube show.

BY THE NUMBERS:

Jack Britton

by Don Stradley • Illustration by KronkAAArt

Few fighters were as smooth as Jack Britton (1885-1962). Born William J. Breslin in Clinton, New York, his quick hands and deft footwork led reporters to call him “The Boxing Marvel.” Here’s his story by the numbers.

346 fights* »

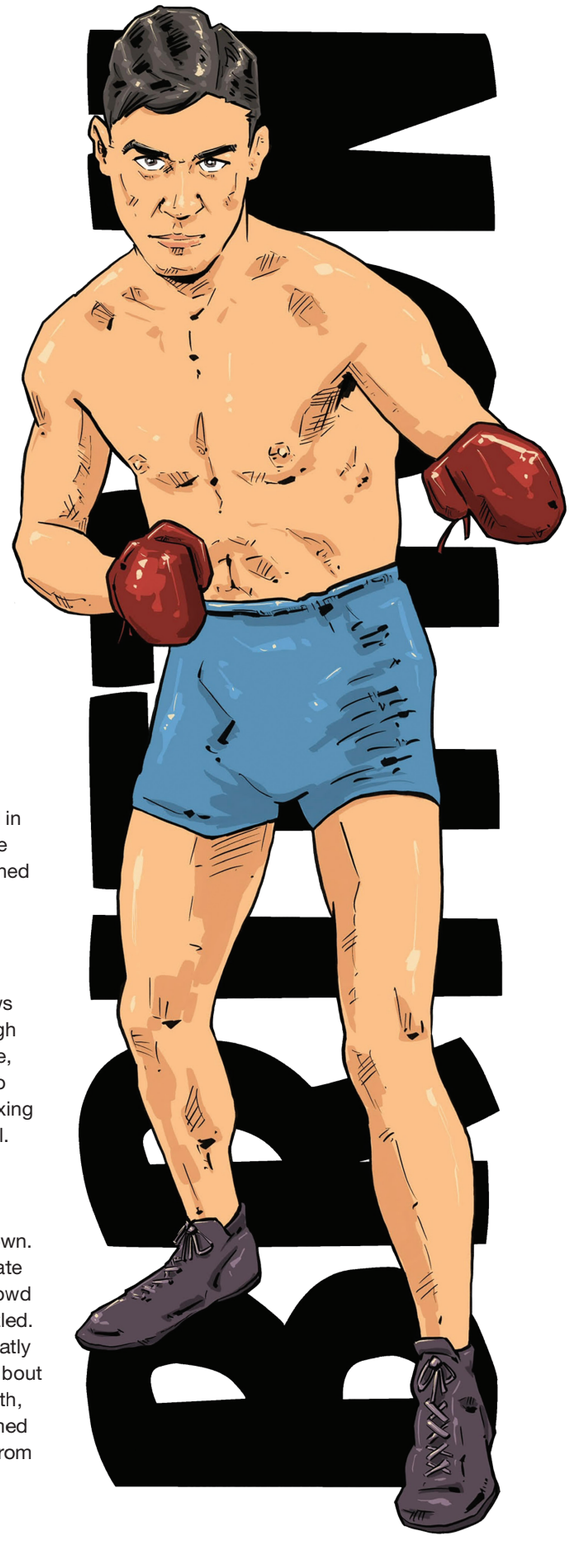
This is believed to be the most professional fights of any champion, accomplished by way of 1,473 rounds. Not counting his no-decision bouts, Britton’s record is now given on BoxRec.com as 104-30-20, with 30 knockouts and five no-contests.

187 no-decision bouts »

For those not born during the Benjamin Harrison presidency, some explanation of no-decision bouts might be due. In Britton’s time, professional boxing was outlawed in many states. Laws were passed in certain areas permitting athletic clubs to host boxing, but unless there was a knockout, there’d be no decision rendered. The law was designed to curb gambling, but it was silly; it allowed talented fighters such as Britton to simply dance around an opponent for six or 10 rounds. He risked nothing but collected a payday. Worse, writers on press row sometimes accepted bribes to say a certain fighter won. (A ruthless manager might also race to the nearest telegraph wire, informing news desks that their fighter had dominated, whether he had or not.) Though many of these no-decision or “newspaper” contests were competitive, just as many were glorified exhibitions. Still, customers were happy to buy a ticket to see fighters they’d only read about. To witness the Boxing Marvel in person, even in a no-decision event, was something special.

1 sketchy bout with Benny Leonard »

In a 1922 money grab, welterweight boss Britton defended his title against longtime lightweight champion Leonard. Britton had the bout won when Leonard dropped him with a body shot in the 13th round. Inexplicably, Leonard then rushed forward and struck Britton while he was down. This drew Leonard an immediate disqualification and left the crowd at New York’s Velodrome puzzled. Though both fighters were greatly admired, many suspected the bout was a fraud. For what it is worth, one of Leonard’s trainers claimed years later that the fix was in from the start. Who knows?



1 Cauliflower ear »

Britton’s left ear was so misshapen that he used it to distract opponents. He did this by leading with his head slightly cocked. The ghastly appendage would lull his rival into something like hypnosis. When Britton saw that his opponent’s eyes were preoccupied with his ear, he’d pop the guy. Britton knew it was hard to not stare at his damaged ear. Referee Billy Roche described it as “one of the most elaborate cauliflower ears I ever saw.” • Another way Britton used the ear was to spread rumors before a bout that it pained him, and that he hoped his opponent would lay off it. This always resulted in his rival spending an inordinate amount of time focusing on the ear, trying to hit it. Britton, slicker than ice, would easily shift away and counter. Besides, the joke was on the opponent, because the ear was dead. Britton called it his “tin ear,” or his “cushion,” and claimed he could take punches on it all day and not feel them. • “A big bruiser smashed that ear for me at a gym when I was just a kid learning the ropes,” Britton said in 1941, “and when I got home and saw that puffed mass, I nearly died of fright.” Upset by the swollen ear, he vowed that no opponent would ever hit him flush again. “Learning to protect that ear made me clever, and pretty soon no one was hitting me anywhere.”

20 bouts with Ted “Kid” Lewis »

There are rivalries, and then there are rivalries. And then there was the rivalry between Britton and Lewis. As one sportswriter put it, these two met “as often as corned beef and cabbage.” When they fought for the second time in 1915, Lewis won on points and was declared the official welterweight titleholder. Britton took the title from Lewis in 1916, only to lose it back to him in 1917. Britton reclaimed the laurels on St. Patrick’s Day 1919, this time by a knockout in the ninth. This may have been Britton’s finest hour. “Lewis did not land five clean blows,” reported The New York Times as a testament to Britton’s defensive skill. • Legend has it that Lewis and Britton disliked each other and never shook hands before or after their many contests. In their final bout in 1921, Britton even took a swing at one of Lewis’ cornermen, objecting to Lewis wearing a new invention: a rubber mouthguard. Still, some journalists felt the animosity was a ruse, and that the extended series was little more than a traveling roadshow.

3 turns as welterweight champion »

Britton was the first three-time champion at welterweight. His third reign was probably the most impressive, as he was getting older but still fending off such opponents as Pinky Mitchell, Dave Shade, Jock Malone and Frankie Maguire. Britton was 37 when he lost the title to 21-year-old Mickey Walker on points in November 1922. “He was one of the shrewdest ring generals the game ever saw,” Walker wrote in his 1961 autobiography. The old ring master was down four times but managed to hang on until the final bell. “I felt sorry for him,” Walker added. “He was standing there, with tears in his eyes, as I left the ring with his title.” Ring announcer Joe Humphries roused the Madison Square Garden crowd to stand up and pay tribute to Britton, which resulted in what the New York Daily News called “probably the greatest ovation that ever was accorded a fallen champion.”

44 years old at the time he retired »

After 25 years in the business, Britton retired in 1930 at 44. Some states in those days had a mandatory retirement age of 38, so Britton was considered one of the ring’s truly ancient performers. He credited his style for helping him last so long. Just before his final bout, he said, “I always depend on speed and cleverness, and seldom tried for a KO. Maybe that’s why I have fought all the best boys in the country.” In retirement, Britton mentored his son Bobby, an acclaimed amateur boxer who compiled a pro record of 48-56-10, with 19 knockouts.

1 notorious manager »

Dumb Dan Morgan, one of boxing’s most remarkable characters, managed Britton for most of his career. Though Morgan managed other fighters, he was especially fond of Britton. The two remained close even after Britton retired. Unfortunately, Morgan’s sneaky work behind the scenes – and his nonstop mouth – sometimes overshadowed Britton’s talents. Britton didn’t care. He and Morgan were tremendous together, as successful a pairing as has ever been seen in the business. Dumb Dan claimed to know a bit about everything, including the best way to develop a fighter’s chin. It involved chewing on tough chuck steak instead of much softer sirloin cuts. There must have been a lot of chuck steaks on Britton’s table, since he was KO’d only once in more than 340 bouts. If money was too scarce to buy chuck steak, Morgan proposed a cheap alternative to hardening a fighter’s jaw: dog biscuits.

**The number varies a bit depending on the source.*

Ring Ratings Analysis

Through fights of January 25, 2025 • By Brian Harty

Inoue: Naoki Fukuda; Pacheco: Melina Pizano

Naoya Inoue (left) KO'd Ye Joon Kim to kick off what could be a very busy year.

POUND FOR POUND: This was an exceptionally slow month for Ring-rated fighters, but P4P No. 2 Naoya Inoue made a welcome appearance on January 24 against Ye Joon Kim in Tokyo. A victory for Kim, who stepped in on short notice to replace a re-injured Sam Goodman, would've been an easy contender for upset of the decade, but we'd be happy to watch The Monster tune up a ukulele if it gives us a chance to see him in action. The 15,000 fans at Ariake Arena seemed to agree, and Inoue extended their viewing experience by letting Kim land some shots in what he later said was a strategy to gauge the South Korean's power. Possibly encouraged by that or maybe even annoyed that Inoue didn't seem to be trying hard enough, Kim doubled down on his brave assignment and gave the universal "come on, hit me" signal with his gloves in the fourth round. Inoue did the universal "OK, pal" thing and knocked Kim flat with a straight right, which is how the fight ended.

Next up for The Monster is a highly anticipated return to Las Vegas, where he will almost certainly face undefeated WBC mandatory Alan Picasso, The Ring's No. 5-rated junior featherweight. For many people outside of Mexico the name won't trigger anything beyond a flash of "Guernica," and Matchroom boss Eddie Hearn has accused Inoue of ducking fellow slugger Murodjon Akhmadaliev, but the fight will nonetheless give U.S. fans a rare chance to see the Japanese phenom in person against a top-five fighter. And after that, "MJ" could be on the menu for a fall reservation in Saudi Arabia.

CRUISERWEIGHT: Australia's Jai Opetaia got chin-checked in Round 2 of his homecoming dance with Kiwi challenger David Nyika, but the division champ showed once again that his boxing skills don't go out the window when he activates his meaner self. Opetaia seems to revel in his mixture of malice and finesse, equally savoring the opportunity to throw quick, bouncy combos from the outside, spike his opponent's head with a pinpoint uppercut at close range or just swing really hard and try to break something. Nyika received it all, and his second-round momentum gave way to a beatdown that ended in unconsciousness with about 45 seconds to go in the fourth round. With that settled, Opetaia, the Ring/IBF titleholder, is in place for a tantalizing unification fight with WBA/WBO incumbent Gilberto Ramirez, who might have to get through mandatory challenger Yuniel Dorticos first. A path to the final palisade of the undisputed crown is uncertain, as the WBC's phobia of a division without a titleholder has somehow led to 41-year-old Badou Jack wearing the green belt despite a layoff of two years and counting.

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHT: Young Diego Pacheco continued his rapid ascent in the ratings, moving from No. 3 to No. 2 and improving his record to 23-0 after a wide decision over unrated but undefeated Steven Nelson. The 6-foot-4 Pacheco expertly used his height/reach advantages to keep Nelson at the end of his power, made good use of a wicked right uppercut at mid-range and showcased his speed in timing his opponent's come-forward style. In the final round, he also showed resilience in shrugging off a solid left hook from Nelson, who gave a gutsy performance as stablemate and fellow Nebraskan Terence Crawford cheered him on from ringside.

At just 23, Diego Pacheco seems to have a massive reservoir of potential.

WELTERWEIGHT: Fighting on the Inoue-Kim undercard, Jin Sasaki (No. 9 last month) won a close-quarters battle with Shoki Sakai, notably

making use of repeated left hooks to the body in carving out a wide unanimous decision. The win was good enough to earn him a lift to No. 8.

LIGHTWEIGHT: At some point mentioning his record will become tiresome, but it still needs to be said that Andy Cruz has only had five professional fights and is already being mentioned as a future pound-for-pound star. In his latest win, the Olympic gold medalist dominated Omar Salcido, who'd impressively upset Chris Colbert by ninth-round stoppage in his previous fight, and was awarded a wide unanimous decision. Cruz rose from No. 9 to No. 8 as a result.

FLYWEIGHT: Felix Alvarado got a bump from No. 7 to No. 6 after scoring a majority decision over previously undefeated Argentine Tobias Reyes. Reyes, who remained ranked at No. 10, was on the back foot for much of the fight and even played keep-away at times, but accurate punching under pressure and infighting when necessary kept him in the game against the volume attack from Alvarado, who was fighting in his hometown of Managua, Nicaragua. Scores were two 115-112 cards in favor of "El Gamelo" ("The Twin," so named because of brother Rene Alvarado, who sports the same moniker) and the third at 114-114.

Artem Dalakian hasn't fought since his January 2024 loss to Seigo Yuri Akui and had nothing scheduled at time of publication, so he was removed from his No. 5 position. Everyone below him moved up, and undefeated Puerto Rican Yankiel Rivera took the resulting vacancy at No. 10.

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHT: Carlos Canizales (No. 5 last month) lost a majority decision to Panya Pradabsri (aka Petchmanee CP Freshmart) with the vacant WBC title on the line, but the decision was highly unpopular (see the "World Beat: Thailand" section in this issue), and Canizales was given a one-spot promotion despite the "L." Freshmart, who was rising from 105 pounds, didn't get a rating.

STRAWWEIGHT: With the departure of Freshmart (rated No. 6), everyone moved up a rank and Joey Canoy of the Philippines moved in at No. 10.

Canoy was later replaced by Yuni Takada, who, despite the lackluster win/loss numbers that had established him as the underdog, notched a very confident split decision victory over countryman Goki Kobayashi on the Inoue-Kim undercard. RING

POUND FOR POUND LIST

1. **OLEKSANDR USYK** — Ukraine • 23-0-0 (14 KOs)
2. **NAOYA INOUE** — Japan • 29-0-0 (26 KOs)
3. **TERENCE CRAWFORD** — U.S. • 41-0-0 (31 KOs)
4. **ARTUR BETERBIEV** — Russia • 21-0-0 (20 KOs)
5. **DMITRY BIVOL** — Russia • 23-1-0 (12 KOs)
6. **JESSE RODRIGUEZ** — U.S. • 21-0-0 (14 KOs)
7. **CANELO ALVAREZ** — Mexico • 62-2-2 (39 KOs)
8. **GERVONTA DAVIS** — U.S. • 30-0-0 (28 KOs)
9. **JUNTO NAKATANI** — Japan • 29-0-0 (22 KOs)
10. **DEVIN HANEY** — U.S. • 31-0-0 (15 KOs)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

- C **(VACANT)**
- 1 **ZHANIBEK ALIMKHANULY** IBF, WBO — Kazakhstan • 16-0-0 (11 KOs)
- 2 **HAMZAH SHEERAZ** — U.K. • 21-0-0 (17 KOs)
- 3 **CARLOS ADAMES** WBC — Dom. Rep. • 24-1-0 (18 KOs)
- 4 **ERISLANDY LARA** WBA — Cuba • 31-3-3 (19 KOs)
- 5 **CHRIS EUBANK JR.** — U.K. • 34-3-0 (25 KOs)
- 6 **ETINOSA OLIHA** — Italy • 21-0-0 (9 KOs)
- 7 **KYRONE DAVIS** — U.S. • 19-3-1 (6 KOs)
- 8 **TROY ISLEY** — U.S. • 14-0-0 (5 KOs)
- 9 **SHANE MOSLEY JR.** — U.S. • 22-4-0 (12 KOs)
- 10 **DENZEL BENTLEY** — U.K. • 21-3-1 (17 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

- C **(VACANT)**
- 1 **TERENCE CRAWFORD** WBA — U.S. • 41-0-0 (31 KOs)
- 2 **ISRAIL MADRIMOV** — Uzbekistan • 10-1-1 (7 KOs)
- 3 **BAKHRAM MURTAZALIEV** IBF — Russia • 23-0-0 (17 KOs)
- 4 **SEBASTIAN FUNDORA** WBC, WBO — U.S. • 21-1-1 (13 KOs)
- 5 **VERGIL ORTIZ** — U.S. • 22-0-0 (21 KOs)
- 6 **SERHII BOHACHUK** — Ukraine • 25-2-0 (24 KOs)
- 7 **TIM TSZYU** — Australia • 24-2-0 (17 KOs)
- 8 **CHARLES CONWELL** — U.S. • 21-0-0 (16 KOs)
- 9 **JESUS RAMOS** — U.S. • 21-1-0 (17 KOs)
- 10 **BRIAN MENDOZA** — U.S. • 22-4-0 (16 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

- C **(VACANT)**
- 1 **JARON ENNIS** IBF — U.S. • 33-0-0 (29 KOs)
- 2 **EIMANTAS STANIONIS** WBA — Lithuania • 15-0-0 (9 KOs)
- 3 **MARIO BARRIOS** WBC — U.S. • 29-2-1 (18 KOs)
- 4 **DAVID AVANESYAN** — Russia • 31-5-1 (19 KOs)
- 5 **BRIAN NORMAN JR.** WBO — U.S. • 26-0-0 (20 KOs)
- 6 **GIOVANI SANTILLAN** — U.S. • 33-1-0 (18 KOs)
- 7 **SHAKHRAM GIYASOV** — Uzbekistan • 16-0-0 (9 KOs)
- 8 **JIN SASAKI** — Japan • 19-1-1 (17 KOs)
- 9 **ALEXIS ROCHA** — U.S. • 25-2-1 (16 KOs)
- 10 **RAUL CURIEL** — Mexico • 15-0-1 (13 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

- C **TEOFIMO LOPEZ** RING, WBO — U.S. • 21-1-0 (13 KOs)
- 1 **DEVIN HANEY** — U.S. • 31-0-0 (15 KOs)
- 2 **JACK CATTERALL** — U.K. • 30-1-0 (13 KOs)
- 3 **ALBERTO PUELLO** WBC — Dom. Rep. • 23-0-0 (10 KOs)
- 4 **RICHARDSON HITCHINS** IBF — U.S. • 19-0-0 (7 KOs)
- 5 **LIAM PARO** — Australia • 25-1-0 (15 KOs)
- 6 **SUBRIEL MATIAS** — Puerto Rico • 21-2-0 (21 KOs)
- 7 **JOSH TAYLOR** — U.K. • 19-2-0 (13 KOs)
- 8 **ANDY HIRAOKA** — Japan • 24-0-0 (19 KOs)
- 9 **ARNOLD BARBOZA** — U.S. • 31-0-0 (11 KOs)
- 10 **JOSE VALENZUELA** WBA — U.S. • 14-2-0 (9 KOs)

JAI OPETAIA: Chris Hyde; Inoue: Naoki Fukuda

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

- C **OLEKSANDR USYK** RING, WBA, WBC, WBO — Ukraine • 23-0-0 (14 KOs)
- 1 **TYSON FURY** — U.K. • 34-2-1 (24 KOs)
- 2 **DANIEL DUBOIS** IBF — U.K. • 22-2-0 (21 KOs)
- 3 **JOSEPH PARKER** — New Zealand • 35-3-0 (23 KOs)
- 4 **ZHILEI ZHANG** — China • 27-2-1 (22 KOs)
- 5 **AGIT KABAYEL** — Germany • 25-0-0 (17 KOs)
- 6 **MARTIN BAKOLE** — Congo • 21-1-0 (16 KOs)
- 7 **ANTHONY JOSHUA** — U.K. • 28-4-0 (25 KOs)
- 8 **FILIP HRGOVIC** — Croatia • 17-1-0 (14 KOs)
- 9 **FABIO WARDLEY** — U.K. • 18-0-1 (17 KOs)
- 10 **EFE AJAGBA** — Nigeria • 20-1-0 (14 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 POUNDS

- C **JAI OPETAIA** RING, IBF — Australia • 27-0-0 (21 KOs)
- 1 **GILBERTO RAMIREZ** WBA, WBO — Mexico • 47-1-0 (30 KOs)
- 2 **CHRIS BILLAM-SMITH** — U.K. • 20-2-0 (13 KOs)
- 3 **ALEKSEI PAPIN** — Russia • 19-1-0 (18 KOs)
- 4 **RICHARD RIAKPORHE** — U.K. • 17-1-0 (13 KOs)
- 5 **ARSEN GOULAMIRIAN** — France • 27-1-0 (19 KOs)
- 6 **MICHAL CIESLAK** — Poland • 27-2-0 (21 KOs)
- 7 **RYAN ROZICKI** — Canada • 20-1-1 (19 KOs)
- 8 **YAMIL PERALTA** — Argentina • 17-1-1 (9 KOs)
- 9 **BRANDON GLANTON** — U.S. • 20-2-0 (17 KOs)
- 10 **LEONARDO MOSQUEA** — France • 16-0-0 (9 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 POUNDS

- C **ARTUR BETERBIEV** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO — Russia • 21-0-0 (20 KOs)
- 1 **DMITRY BIVOL** — Russia • 23-1-0 (12 KOs)
- 2 **DAVID BENAVIDEZ** — U.S. • 29-0-0 (24 KOs)
- 3 **JOSHUA BUATSI** — U.K. • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)
- 4 **ANTHONY YARDE** — U.K. • 26-3-0 (24 KOs)
- 5 **ALBERT RAMIREZ** — Venezuela • 19-0-0 (16 KOs)
- 6 **CALLUM SMITH** — U.K. • 30-2-0 (22 KOs)
- 7 **OLEKSANDR GVOZDYK** — Ukraine • 20-2-0 (16 KOs)
- 8 **DAVID MORRELL** — Cuba • 11-0-0 (9 KOs)
- 9 **WILLY HUTCHINSON** — U.K. • 18-2-0 (13 KOs)
- 10 **IMAM KHATAEV** — Russia • 9-0-0 (9 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

- C **CANELO ALVAREZ** RING, WBA, WBC, WBO — Mexico • 62-2-2 (39 KOs)
- 1 **CHRISTIAN MBILLI** — France • 28-0-0 (23 KOs)
- 2 **DIEGO PACHECO** — U.S. • 23-0-0 (18 KOs)
- 3 **OSLEYS IGLESIAS** — Cuba • 13-0-0 (12 KOs)
- 4 **CALEB PLANT** — U.S. • 23-2-0 (14 KOs)
- 5 **WILLIAM SCULL** IBF — Cuba • 23-0-0 (9 KOs)
- 6 **VLADIMIR SHISHKIN** — Russia • 16-1-0 (10 KOs)
- 7 **BRUNO SURACE** — France • 26-0-2 (5 KOs)
- 8 **JAIME MUNGUIA** — Mexico • 44-2-0 (35 KOs)
- 9 **EDGAR BERLANGA** — U.S. • 22-1-0 (17 KOs)
- 10 **ERIK BAZINYAN** — Canada • 32-1-1 (23 KOs)

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

- C **(VACANT)**
- 1 **GERVONTA DAVIS** WBA — U.S. • 30-0-0 (28 KOs)
- 2 **VASILIY LOMACHENKO** IBF — Ukraine • 18-3-0 (12 KOs)
- 3 **SHAKUR STEVENSON** WBC — U.S. • 22-0-0 (10 KOs)
- 4 **WILLIAM ZEPEDA** — Mexico • 32-0-0 (27 KOs)
- 5 **KEYSHAWN DAVIS** — U.S. • 12-0-0 (8 KOs)
- 6 **DENYS BERINCHYK** WBO — Ukraine • 19-0-0 (9 KOs)
- 7 **RAYMOND MURATALLA** — U.S. • 22-0-0 (17 KOs)
- 8 **ANDY CRUZ** — Cuba • 5-0-0 (2 KOs)
- 9 **FRANK MARTIN** — U.S. • 18-1-0 (12 KOs)
- 10 **TEVIN FARMER** — U.S. • 33-7-1 (8 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

- C **(VACANT)**
- 1 **EMANUEL NAVARRETE** WBO — Mexico • 39-2-1 (32 KOs)
- 2 **O'SHAQUIE FOSTER** WBC — U.S. • 23-3-0 (12 KOs)
- 3 **ANTHONY CACACE** IBF — Ireland • 23-1-0 (8 KOs)
- 4 **LAMONT ROACH** WBA — U.S. • 25-1-1 (10 KOs)
- 5 **JOE CORDINA** — U.K. • 17-1-0 (9 KOs)
- 6 **ROBSON CONCEICAO** — Brazil • 19-3-1 (9 KOs)
- 7 **EDUARDO NUNEZ** — Mexico • 27-1-0 (27 KOs)
- 8 **ALBERT BATYRGAZIEV** — Russia • 11-0-0 (8 KOs)
- 9 **EDUARDO HERNANDEZ** — Mexico • 36-2-0 (32 KOs)
- 10 **ALBERT BELL** — U.S. • 26-0-0 (9 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

- C **(VACANT)**
- 1 **ANGELO LEO** IBF — U.S. • 25-1-0 (12 KOs)
- 2 **RAFAEL ESPINOZA** WBO — Mexico • 26-0-0 (22 KOs)
- 3 **NICK BALL** WBA — U.K. • 21-0-1 (12 KOs)
- 4 **REY VARGAS** — Mexico • 36-1-1 (22 KOs)
- 5 **LUIS ALBERTO LOPEZ** — Mexico • 30-3-0 (17 KOs)
- 6 **BRANDON FIGUEROA** WBC — U.S. • 25-1-1 (19 KOs)
- 7 **MIRCO CUELLO** — Argentina • 14-0-0 (11 KOs)
- 8 **BRUCE CARRINGTON** — U.S. • 14-0-0 (8 KOs)
- 9 **ROBEISY RAMIREZ** — Cuba • 14-3-0 (9 KOs)
- 10 **OMAR TRINIDAD** — U.S. • 18-0-1 (13 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

- C **NAOYA INOUE** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO — Japan • 29-0-0 (26 KOs)
- 1 **MARLON TAPALES** — Philippines • 39-4-0 (20 KOs)
- 2 **MURODJON AKHMADALIEV** — Uzbekistan • 13-1-0 (10 KOs)
- 3 **SAM GOODMAN** — Australia • 19-0-0 (8 KOs)
- 4 **LUIS NERY** — Mexico • 35-2-0 (27 KOs)
- 5 **ALAN PICASSO** — Mexico • 31-0-1 (17 KOs)
- 6 **SHABAZ MASOUD** — U.K. • 14-0-0 (4 KOs)
- 7 **TJ DOHENY** — Ireland • 26-5-0 (20 KOs)
- 8 **ELIJAH PIERCE** — U.S. • 20-2-0 (16 KOs)
- 9 **RAMON CARDENAS** — U.S. • 25-1-0 (14 KOs)
- 10 **SEBASTIAN HERNANDEZ** — Mexico • 18-0-0 (17 KOs)

RING RATINGS ANALYSIS THROUGH FIGHTS OF JANUARY 25, 2025

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

C (VACANT)

1 JUNTO NAKATANI WBC
Japan • 29-0-0 (22 KOs)

2 RYOSUKE NISHIDA IBF
Japan • 10-0-0 (2 KOs)

3 SEIYA TSUTSUMI WBA
Japan • 12-0-2 (8 KOs)

4 YOSHIKI TAKEI WBO
Japan • 10-0-0 (8 KOs)

5 TAKUMA INOUE
Japan • 20-2-0 (5 KOs)

6 EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ
Puerto Rico • 22-3-0 (13 KOs)

7 JASON MOLONEY
Australia • 27-3-0 (19 KOs)

8 DAVID CUELLAR
Mexico • 28-0-0 (18 KOs)

9 DAIGO HIGA
Japan • 21-3-1 (19 KOs)

10 JEYVIER CINTRON
Puerto Rico • 13-1-0 (6 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

C JESSE RODRIGUEZ RING, WBC
U.S. • 21-0-0 (14 KOs)

1 FERNANDO MARTINEZ WBA
Argentina • 17-0-0 (9 KOs)

2 JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA
Mexico • 44-4-0 (28 KOs)

3 KAZUTO IOKA
Japan • 31-3-1 (16 KOs)

4 PHUMELELE CAFU WBO
South Africa • 11-0-3 (8 KOs)

5 KOSEI TANAKA
Japan • 20-2-0 (11 KOs)

6 CARLOS CUADRAS
Mexico • 43-5-1 (28 KOs)

7 ANDREW MOLONEY
Australia • 27-4-0 (17 KOs)

8 SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI
Thailand • 58-6-1 (47 KOs)

9 DAVID JIMENEZ
Costa Rica • 16-1-0 (11 KOs)

10 PEDRO GUEVARA
Mexico • 42-5-1 (22 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

C (VACANT)

1 ANGEL AYALA IBF
Mexico • 18-0-0 (8 KOs)

2 KENSHIRO TERAJI WBC
Japan • 24-1-0 (15 KOs)

3 SEIGO YURI AKUI WBA
Japan • 21-2-1 (11 KOs)

4 GALAL YAFAI
U.K. • 9-0-0 (7 KOs)

5 FELIX ALVARADO
Nicaragua • 42-4-0 (35 KOs)

6 RICARDO SANDOVAL
U.S. • 25-2-0 (18 KOs)

7 ANTHONY OLASCUAGA WBO
U.S. • 8-1-0 (6 KOs)

8 FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ JR.
Mexico • 39-6-1 (27 KOs)

9 TOBIAS REYES
Argentina • 16-1-1 (15 KOs)

10 YANKIEL RIVERA
Puerto Rico • 7-0-0 (3 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

C (VACANT)

1 MASAMICHI YABUKI IBF
Japan • 17-4-0 (16 KOs)

2 SHOKICHI IWATA WBO
Japan • 14-1-0 (11 KOs)

3 SIVENATHI NONTSHINGA
S. Africa • 13-2-0 (10 KOs)

4 CARLOS CANIZALES
Venezuela • 27-3-1 (19 KOs)

5 ADRIAN CURIEL
Mexico • 25-6-1 (5 KOs)

6 THANONGSAK SIMSRI
Thailand • 37-1-0 (33 KOs)

7 CRISTIAN ARANETA
Philippines • 25-2-0 (20 KOs)

8 REGIE SUGANOB
Philippines • 16-1-0 (6 KOs)

9 ERICK ROSA
Dom. Rep. • 8-0-0 (2 KOs)

10 ELWIN SOTO
Mexico • 21-3-1 (13 KOs)

Jin Sasaki: Naoki Fukuda; Canizales: SOPA Images

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

C OSCAR COLLAZO RING, WBA, WBO
U.S. • 11-0-0 (8 KOs)

1 MELVIN JERUSALEM WBC
Philippines • 23-3-0 (12 KOs)

2 PEDRO TADURAN IBF
Philippines • 17-4-1 (13 KOs)

3 KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART
Thailand • 25-1-0 (9 KOs)

4 YUDAI SHIGEOKA
Japan • 9-1-0 (5 KOs)

5 GINJIRO SHIGEOKA
Japan • 11-1-0 (9 KOs)

6 WILFREDO MENDEZ
Puerto Rico • 19-3-1 (6 KOs)

7 HASANBOY DUSMATOV
Uzbekistan • 6-0-0 (5 KOs)

8 DIANXING ZHU
China • 14-1-0 (12 KOs)

9 SIYAKHOLWA KUSE
S. Africa • 8-2-1 (4 KOs)

10 YUNI TAKADA
Japan • 16-8-3 (6 KOs)

HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED
RECORDS PROVIDED BY BOXREC.COM

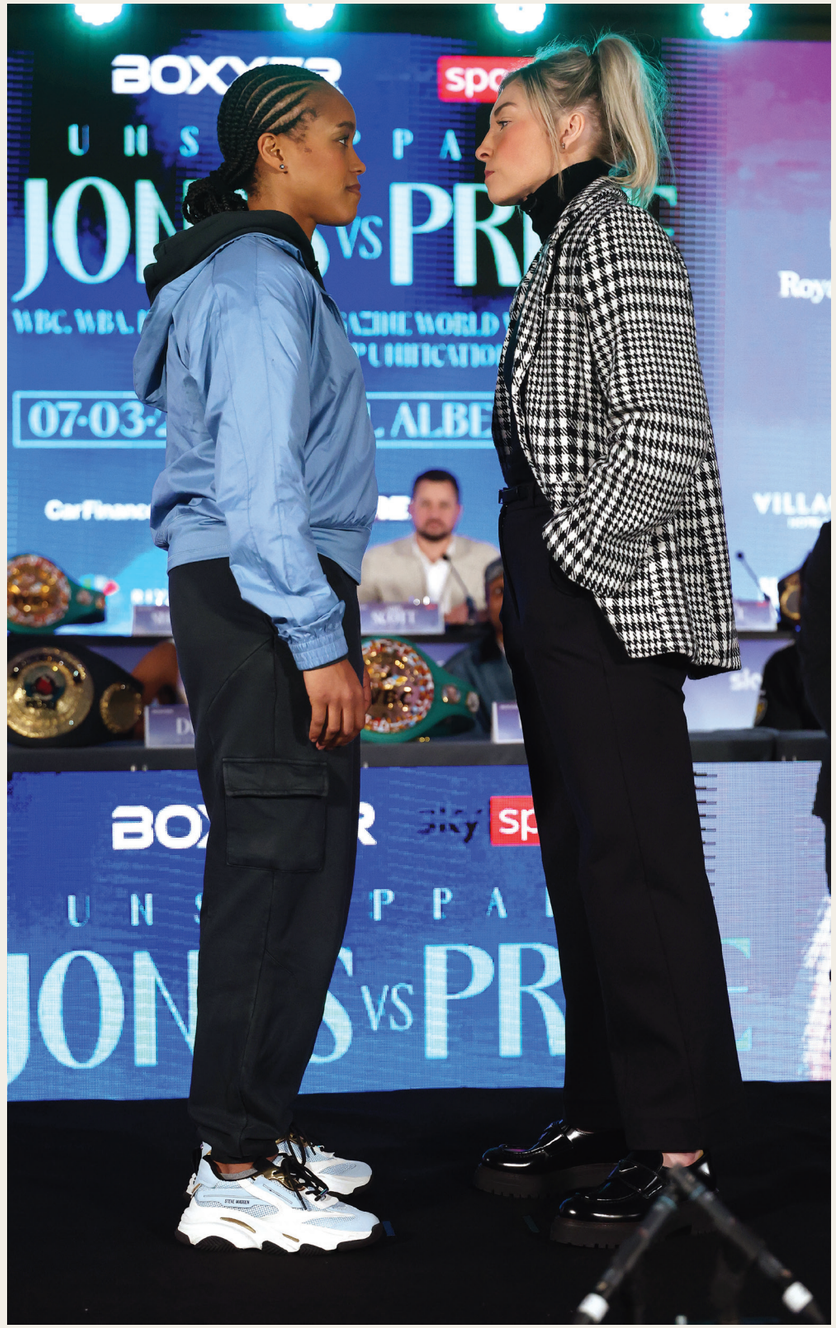
Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. The Ring's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the Ring title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose their belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which they are champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at their championship weight for 18 months (even if they fight at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

The Ring Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

Women's Ring Ratings Analysis

Through fights of January 19, 2025 • By Diego Morilla



Richard Pelham

POUND-FOR-POUND:
The mythical list of the most distinguished fighters regardless of weight did not see any changes during this unusually inactive period, but it will definitely undergo some serious changes as the year moves along.

The upcoming Ring welterweight clash between our champion, Lauren Price, and former junior middleweight champ Natasha Jonas is one of the fights that could have a significant impact on the pound-for-pound list. The compelling matchup will feature two of the most talented British amateur stars of the past decade in a championship bout that is already building up as a grudge match. It could easily turn into a trilogy if the performances reflect the animosity between these two.

Speaking of trilogies, a potential third clash between future shoo-in Hall of Famer Katie Taylor and nemesis Chantelle Cameron could threaten to crown a new pound-for-pound queen, should they repeat their extraordinary performances in the first two clashes. For Taylor, it could be the final step toward retirement after an extraordinary, made-for-Hollywood career. For Cameron, it could not only be a chance to reclaim the junior welterweight Ring championship she lost to Taylor in a rematch of their fantastic first encounter, but also a chance to make a considerable case for becoming

Ring/WBA champion Lauren Price (right) will meet IBF/WBC titleholder Natasha Jonas on March 7.

the next No. 1 in the list.

The fighter feeling the pressure at the top of the pound-for-pound rankings will be none other than Claressa Shields, who will be taking on Danielle Perkins in a fight outside her natural weight in the near future.

As the current and reigning Ring middleweight champion, Shields is no stranger to changing weights – or even sports (she had a brief stint as an MMA fighter). She was our inaugural middleweight and junior middleweight champion, and she held a couple of super middleweight belts as well. But lack of viable opposition coupled with her desire to accumulate accolades drove Shields to seek title fights in other weight classes that are still not well-defined by boxing commissions and organizations at large.

In her last outing, Shields defeated Canada's Vanessa Lepage-Joanisse in a bout that featured both a vacant light heavyweight title and a heavyweight belt but took place within the 175-pound weight limit. This is because any women above 168 pounds are considered heavyweights by the WBC. And now, as we go to press, three vacant heavyweight titles, including one from the WBA that never existed before, are about to go on the line as Shields takes on Danielle Perkins (5-0) in a fight that is potentially designed to cement Shields' claim as the most decorated female fighter of all time.

That's where another conundrum comes into play: There are only about two dozen active fighters worldwide in those divisions, and more than half of them have a big, round zero in their win column. Fighters with double digits in any column (or in their overall records, even) are also a rarity. It is for this reason that The Ring does not include the light heavyweight and heavyweight divisions in its women's rankings – a decision that is revisited periodically as the sport grows.

With this in mind, it will be interesting to see how Shields hangs on to her No. 1 P4P position as the rest of the pack finds more compelling bouts to build their legacies on. It's not Shields' fault, but it will end up affecting the discussion of who is the best fighter on this planet as the year trudges on.

POUND FOR POUND LIST

1	**CLARESSA SHIELDS**	U.S. • 15-0-0 (3 KOs)
2	**KATIE TAYLOR**	Ireland • 24-1-0 (6 KOs)
3	**CHANTELLE CAMERON**	U.K. • 20-1-0 (8 KOs)
4	**AMANDA SERRANO**	Puerto Rico • 47-3-1 (31 KOs)
5	**DINA THORSLUND**	Denmark • 23-0-0 (9 KOs)
6	**GABRIELA FUNDORA**	U.S. • 15-0-0 (7 KOs)
7	**YOKASTA VALLE**	Costa Rica • 32-3-0 (10 KOs)
8	**ALYCIA BAUMGARDNER**	U.S. • 15-1-0 (7 KOs)
9	**NATASHA JONAS**	U.K. • 16-2-1 (9 KOs)
10	**MIKAELA MAYER**	U.S. • 20-2-0 (5 KOs)

The much-anticipated Caroline Dubois-Jessica Camara fight turned into a bloody mess because of a cut on Camara's eyebrow.

Other than that, at a time of the year when only a few relevant fights took place, some of our top-rated contenders saw action with uneven results.

On January 11, Caroline Dubois, sister of heavyweight titleholder Daniel and rated No. 1 by The Ring at lightweight, had her WBC title defense cut short quite literally when a gash opened on her foe Jessica Camara's left eyebrow, prompting an anticlimactic ending – a three-round technical draw – to the month's most anticipated fight. Dubois was on her way to what looked like an easy victory after dropping the experienced but limited Camara in the first round.

On January 17, Japan's Mizuki Hiruta underwent a similar situation that ended in a better result for her. Hiruta scored a technical decision in eight rounds over a badly cut Maribel Ramirez in a defense of her WBO junior bantamweight title, and thus she also held onto her No. 1 position in a stacked division. RING

Richard Sellers

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

- C **SAVANNAH MARSHALL** RING,IBF — U.K. • 13-1-0 (10 KOs)
- 1 **FRANCHON CREWS-DEZURN** WBA,WBC — U.S. • 9-2-0 (2 KOs)
- 2 **SHADASIA GREEN** WBO — U.S. • 15-1-0 (11 KOs)
- 3 **LANI DANIELS** — New Zealand • 11-2-2 (1 KO)
- 4 **MARY CASAMASSA** — U.S. • 6-0-0 (1 KO)
- 5 **CITLALLI ORTIZ** — Mexico • 4-1-0 (1 KO)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

- C **CLARESSA SHIELDS** RING,WBA,WBC — U.S. • 15-0-0 (3 KOs)
- 1 **DESLEY ROBINSON** — Australia • 9-3-0 (3 KOs)
- 2 **MELINDA WATPOOL** — Canada • 7-1-0 (2 KOs)
- 3 **MAPULE NGUBANE** — S. Africa • 14-9-3 (3 KOs)
- 4 **ADRIANA DOS SANTOS ARAUJO** — Brazil • 6-3-0 (1 KO)
- 5 **CHLOE CHAOS** — Australia • 5-1-1 (3 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

- C. **(VACANT)**
- 1 **OSHAE JONES** IBF — U.S. • 8-0-0 (3 KOs)
- 2 **CECILIA BRAEKHUS** — Norway • 38-2-1 (9 KOs)
- 3 **FEMKE HERMANS** — Belgium • 18-5-0 (7 KOs)
- 4 **MARY SPENCER** WBA — Canada • 9-2-0 (6 KOs)
- 5 **PRISCILLA PETERLE** — France • 11-0-0 (3 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

- C **LAUREN PRICE** RING,WBA — U.K. • 8-0-0 (2 KO)
- 1 **NATASHA JONAS** IBF,WBC — U.K. • 16-2-1 (9 KOs)
- 2 **MIKAELA MAYER** WBO — U.S. • 20-2-0 (5 KOs)
- 3 **SANDY RYAN** — U.K. • 7-2-1 (3 KOs)
- 4 **JESSICA MCCASKILL** — U.S. • 12-4-1 (5 KOs)
- 5 **IVANA HABAZIN** — Croatia • 23-6-0 (7 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

- C **KATIE TAYLOR** RING,IBF,WBA,WBC,WBO — Ireland • 24-1-0 (6 KOs)
- 1 **CHANTELLE CAMERON** — U.K. • 20-1-0 (8 KOs)
- 2 **SAMANTHA WORTHINGTON** — U.S. • 10-0-0 (7 KOs)
- 3 **FLORA PILI** — France • 10-0-0 (1 KO)
- 4 **ELIZABETH OSHOBA** — Nigeria • 8-0 (5 KOs)
- 5 **ELHEM MEKHALED** — France • 17-3 (3 KOs)

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

- C. **(VACANT)**
- 1 **CAROLINE DUBOIS** WBC — U.K. • 10-0-1 (5 KOs)
- 2 **BEATRIZ FERREIRA** IBF — Brazil • 6-0-0 (2 KOs)
- 3 **TERRI HARPER** WBO — U.K. • 15-2-2 (6 KOs)
- 4 **RHIANNON DIXON** — U.K. • 10-1-0 (1 KO)
- 5 **MAIRA MONEO** — Uruguay • 15-2-0 (3 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

- C **ALYCIA BAUMGARDNER** RING,IBF,WBA,WBC,WBO — U.S. • 15-1-0 (7 KOs)
- 1 **DELFINE PERSOON** — Belgium • 49-3-0 (19 KOs)
- 2 **BO MI RE SHIN** — South Korea • 18-2-3 (10 KOs)
- 3 **LEILA BEAUDOIN** — Canada • 12-1-0 (1 KO)
- 4 **JENNIFER MIRANDA** — Spain • 12-0-0 (1 KO)
- 5 **MEA MOTU** — New Zealand • 20-0-0 (8 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

- C **AMANDA SERRANO** RING,WBA,WBO — Puerto Rico • 47-3-1 (31 KOs)
- 1 **SKYE NICOLSON** WBC — Australia • 12-0-0 (1 KO)
- 2 **NINA MEINKE** IBF — German • 19-3-0 (4 KOs)
- 3 **SARAH MAHFOUD** — Denmark • 15-2-0 (3 KOs)
- 4 **DANIELA BERMUDEZ** — Argentina • 32-5-3 (12 KOs)
- 5 **RAVEN CHAPMAN** — U.K. • 9-1 (2 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

- C **ELLIE SCOTNEY** RING,IBF,WBO — U.K. • 9-0-0 (0 KOs)
- 1 **YAMILETH MERCADO** WBC — Mexico • 24-3-0 (5 KOs)
- 2 **SEGOLENE LEFEBVRE** — France • 19-1-0 (1 KO)
- 3 **NAZARENA ROMERO** WBA — Argentina • 14-0-2 (8 KOs)
- 4 **ERIKA CRUZ-HERNANDEZ** — Mexico • 17-2-1 (3 KOs)
- 5 **MIKIAH KREPS** — U.S. • 9-0-0 (3 KOs)

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

- C **DINA THORSLUND** RING,WBC,WBO — Denmark • 23-0-0 (9 KOs)
- 1 **YULIAHN LUNA AVILA** — Mexico • 27-4-1 (4 KOs)
- 2 **CHERNEKA JOHNSON** WBA — Australia • 16-2-0 (6 KOs)
- 3 **NINA HUGHES** — U.K. • 6-1-0 (2 KOs)
- 4 **SHURRETTA METCALF** IBF — U.S. • 14-4-1 (2 KOs)
- 5 **MIYO YOSHIDA** — Japan • 17-5-0 (0 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

- C **(VACANT)**
- 1 **MIZUKI HIRUTA** WBO — Japan • 7-0-0 (2 KOs)
- 2 **CARLA MERINO** — Argentina • 16-2-0 (4 KOs)
- 3 **GINNY FUCHS** — U.S. • 4-0-0 (1 KO)
- 4 **ADELAIDA RUIZ** — U.S. • 16-1-1 (8 KOs)
- 5 **ASLEY GONZALEZ** WBC — Mexico • 17-2 (7 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

- C **GABRIELA FUNDORA** RING,IBF,WBA,WBC,WBO — U.S. • 15-0-0 (7 KOs)
- 1 **GABRIELA ALANIZ** — Argentina • 15-2-0 (6 KOs)
- 2 **MARLEN ESPARZA** — U.S. • 15-2-0 (1 KO)
- 3 **KENIA ENRIQUEZ** — Mexico • 28-1-0 (11 KOs)
- 4 **ARELY MUCINO** — Mexico • 32-5-2 (11 KOs)
- 5 **IBETH ZAMORA** — Mexico • 33-8-0 (13 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

- C **(VACANT)**
- 1 **EVELIN BERMUDEZ** IBF,WBO — Argentina • 20-1-1 (7 KOs)
- 2 **KIM CLAVEL** — Canada • 20-2-0 (3 KOs)
- 3 **SARA BAILEY** WBA — Canada • 5-0 (0 KOs)
- 4 **LOURDES JUAREZ** WBC — Mexico • 37-4-0 (4 KOs)
- 5 **ANABEL ORTIZ** — Mexico • 34-7-0 (4 KOs)

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

- C **(VACANT)**
- 1 **YOKASTA VALLE** WBC — Costa Rica • 32-3-0 (10 KOs)
- 2 **SARAH BORMANN** WBO — Germany • 19-1-0 (7 KOs)
- 3 **ANABEL ORTIZ** — Mexico • 34-7-0 (4 KOs)
- 4 **SOL CUDOS** — Argentina • 9-0-2 (3 KOs)
- 5 **SOL BAUMSTARH** — Argentina • 12-6-1 (8 KOs)

ATOMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 102 POUNDS

- C **TINA RUPPRECHT** RING,WBA,WBC,WBO — Germany • 14-1-1 (3 KOs)
- 1 **SUMIRE YAMANAKA** IBF — Japan • 8-0-0 (3 KOs)
- 2 **ERI MATSUDA** — Japan • 7-2-1 (1 KO)
- 3 **YUKO KUROKI** — Japan • 23-8-2 (10 KOs)
- 4 **ESNEIDY RODRIGUEZ OLMOS** — Mexico • 9-0-1 (0 KOs)
- 5 **FABIANA BYTYQI** — Czech Republic • 21-1-2 (5 KOs)

2024 RING MAGAZINE AWARDS

THE BOXING WORLD HONORED ITS HIGHEST ACHIEVERS AT THE RING'S INAUGURAL AWARD CEREMONY IN LONDON

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Kareem Nour

1. Fighter of the Year trophy; 2. Old Royal Naval College; 3. Bruno Surace wins Upset of the Year; 4. Billy Dib; 5. Teofimo Lopez; 6. Fighter of the Year Oleksandr Usyk kept it short and sweet; 7. Ring Editor-in-Chief Doug Fischer; 8. The Ring Awards ring; 9. Raymond Ford accepts the Fight of the Year trophy; 10. Skye Nicolson presented the Female Fighter of the Year award to Gabriela Fundora.

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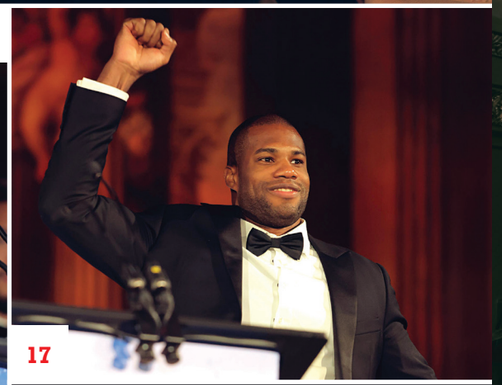
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11. Teddy Atlas presented the Trainer of the Year award; 12. Devin Haney; 13. Event emcee Michael Buffer; 14. Canelo Alvarez; 15. Trainer of the Year Robert Garcia; 16. His Excellency chats with Anthony Joshua; 17. Daniel Dubois celebrates winning Knockout of the Year; 18. Fighter of the Year Gabriela Fundora.

Photos By Kareem Nour; (13/16) Mark Robinson; (Right) GEA

Richard Pelham

TWO CLOSE WINS OVER TYSON FURY IN 2024 HAVE SEEN THE BRILLIANT UKRAINIAN SECURE ALL-TIME GREAT STATUS.

By John Evans

OLEKSANDR USYK:
FIGHTER OF THE YEAR 2024

The world should know exactly who the heavyweight champion of the world is.

Over the past decade, a long series of dramatic, unpredictable fights have brought the sport's glamor division back to prominence, but there has always been a conversation to be had over who truly was the best.

Deontay Wilder and Anthony Joshua reigned as titleholders for years but circled each other without ever getting into the ring. Tyson Fury's stunning return and thrilling trilogy with Wilder shifted the debate to whether it was him or Joshua who held the strongest claim to being recognized as number one.

Before we could answer that question, Oleksandr Usyk arrived on the scene.

A pair of victories over Joshua left Usyk and Fury as the last men standing from their generation.

Thankfully, this time, the conversation took place in a ring and we got a definitive answer.

In 2024, Usyk separated himself from his peers.

This is the great Ukrainian's second Fighter of the Year award.

The incredible run that earned him the honor in 2018 saw him defeat his cruiserweight rivals one by one – all on enemy territory. He unified the division by beating Mairis Breidis in a war, became the undisputed 200-pound champion by outclassing Murat Gassiev and then defended his titles against Tony Bellew.

In contrast, the 2024 campaign was centered around one man.

Fighter of the Year awards are usually given for a fighter's achievements over a 12-month period, but the 36-year-old Usyk had been embroiled in his rivalry with Fury since the fight was first announced on September 29, 2023 – almost eight months before he and the two-time champion first answered the bell.

The fight was postponed twice. First, the original December 23 date was pushed back because of Fury's tougher than expected outing against former MMA champion Francis Ngannou. Just two weeks before the rescheduled date of February 17, Fury picked up a cut during sparring and, having been close to peaking, the fighters had to rejig training.

Adding all of that to the equation, Usyk's 15-month-long campaign wasn't a procession. It was one of technical brilliance but also a triumph of mental toughness, dedication and discipline.

Finally, in May, the great and the good of the boxing world descended on Riyadh for the first undisputed heavyweight title fight since Lennox Lewis beat Evander Holyfield back in 1999.

They were to witness a fight that had the drama, the twists and the turns of the legendary heavyweight clashes of the past and a performance that secured the winner a place among the greats of the sport.

Usyk made a quick, active start, stabbing to the body and pressing forward.

Fury is a true modern super heavyweight, but he is also blessed with outstanding movement for a fighter of his size and an enormous heart.

"The Gypsy King" is also extremely smart.

He gradually came to terms with Usyk's speed and constant movement and managed to gain a foothold in the fight. Although never dominant, he began to tighten his grip on the fight in the middle rounds. His bodywork began to reap dividends, but it was the uppercut that caused the most significant damage.

Richard Pelham

After seven rounds, Usyk sat down on his stool facing a mini-crisis.

Undisputed titles – and Fighter of the Year awards – aren't easily won.

Usyk is famed for his late-round rallies. The sensational, lung-bursting effort he put in during the championship rounds of his first fight with Joshua is a memorable example, but time and time again, he has timed his late-rounds charge to perfection.

Normally Usyk's opponents have been worn down mentally by the time he decides to put his foot down. This time, he instinctively realized that he needed to up the ante earlier than normal.

A devout Orthodox Christian, Usyk kissed a crucifix that had been given to him by a Greek monk and plunged back into the fray.

He began to turn the tide in the eighth, rediscovering the bounce that had left his legs and scoring with a series of clean left hands that damaged Fury's eye and nose.

Round 9 will go down in heavyweight folklore. As an increasingly disorganized Fury drifted to his right, Usyk timed him with a picture-perfect left. The following 40 seconds passed in a blur as a hurt Fury reeled from corner to corner. Somewhere amid the chaos, Fury was given a count before the bell rang to end the round.

USYK'S 15-MONTH LONG CAMPAIGN WASN'T A PROCESSION. IT WAS ONE OF TECHNICAL BRILLIANCE BUT ALSO A TRIUMPH OF MENTAL TOUGHNESS, DEDICATION AND DISCIPLINE.

The iron-willed Fury survived and – somehow – finished strongly, but after a tension-filled wait, Usyk was announced the winner by split decision.

It is extremely rare for the heavyweight champion to also be regarded as the best pound-for-pound fighter on the planet, but on the biggest stage imaginable, Usyk showed exactly why so many people view him as the world's most complete fighter.

His technical abilities are well-known and respected, but his sheer refusal to be beaten was also on full display during the historic fight, and he did it against a taller, heavier, elite-level opponent.

Had 2024 ended there and then, the magnitude of Usyk's achievement would have been enough to earn him the Fighter of the Year award, but Fury's decision to trigger an immediate rematch clause in the contract meant that Usyk had to prove himself all over again.

Compared to the long, drawn-out buildup to the first fight, the lead-up to the second fight was straightforward and businesslike.

The rematch posed a new set of problems for Usyk.

World-level operators are adept at making adjustments on the fly and tweaking tactics in real time. Given 12 rounds to look at each other and seven months to prepare, fighters can turn up for a return with a totally different game plan than they did the first time around.

The chameleon-like Fury's unpredictability already makes him extremely difficult to prepare for, and the former champion appeared to have the wider scope for change.

He could spar without the worry of reopening the cut that hindered his preparations before the first fight, and he could also alter his weight. Undefeated in rematches, arguably his best career performance came when he bulked up and bullied Deontay Wilder to defeat in their second encounter.

Usyk also faced a different mental battle.

He was never going to allow complacency to affect his preparations, but had he allowed even the slightest satisfaction from achieving his long-term goal to seep into his mindset, Fury would have immediately sensed it.

Rather than altering his preparations in anticipation at what might happen, Usyk trusted the approach that has served him so well in the past.

In December, the fighters returned to Riyadh, where a brooding, bearded Fury posed a more serious, menacing presence. Usyk was his usual ice-cold self.

With both fighters now well aware of the repercussions for even the smallest error, the rematch understandably lacked the jaw-dropping moments of drama that highlighted the first fight, but it was an absorbing, nip-and-tuck battle throughout.

This time, Usyk had to fight harder to claim the center of the ring. In a bid to make his presence felt, Fury weighed in heavier than he did the first time around and tried to take the initiative behind a much-improved jab. Usyk took what he could get and concentrated on firing in jabs and straight left hands to the body.

As difficult as it was to push back a man who outweighed him by around 50 pounds, Usyk isn't one to shy away from a tough task. He did it with feints and footwork. Importantly, he also took away the uppercut that had worked so well for Fury before.

Both fighters walked the tightrope through the championship rounds, but Usyk maintained his concentration and his seemingly limitless gas tank once again kept him going to the final bell. Although the fight felt extremely close, this time the judges were in agreement and awarded him a unanimous decision victory.

Usyk's decision to vacate his IBF belt meant that the undisputed title wasn't on the line the second time around, but the fight didn't need that title.

The heavyweight championship remains the greatest and most prestigious title in sport, and it requires a certain type of character to carry it. The title doesn't weigh heavily on Usyk's shoulders.

He is a unique personality who is adept at disarming interviewers and opponents with his quirky answers and behavior. Away from the cameras and in the ring, he is deadly serious about his business and boxing career.

As war continued to rage in his homeland, Usyk remained fixated on the task at hand. He accomplished it.

2024 wasn't just the year that Usyk wrote his name into the history books as the first undisputed heavyweight champion of the 21st century. It was also the year he cemented his position as one of the greatest fighters of all time. RING

GABRIELA FUNDORA:
FIGHTER OF THE YEAR 2024

Chris Esqueda/Golden Boy

SHE ENDED 2023 AS A TITLEHOLDER WITH HIGH POTENTIAL, BUT 2024 WAS THE YEAR WOMEN'S BOXING GOT A NEW UNDISPUTED STAR

By Ruth Raper

As a new year dawns, the boxing world finds itself in a moment of reflection, looking back at the turbulent year that was 2024 while anticipating the promise of what lies ahead. The past 12 months have witnessed several female fighters positioning themselves for greatness in 2025, laying foundations for potentially career-defining moments. Yet few, if any, have commanded attention and respect quite like Gabriela Fundora.

The southpaw sensation from Coachella, California, dominated the women's boxing landscape in 2024. She maintained a perfect record through three bouts, securing two stoppages and displaying such commanding performances that she rarely lost a round.

Fundora's first outing of 2024 saw her take on "The Hell's Kitchen Kid," Christina Cruz. In the first half of the contest, Fundora edged forward on the front foot, snapping Cruz's head back with sharp southpaw jabs. Fundora was able to make the New York native miss by using a slight lean back while still pressing forward (one of the advantages of having a big reach advantage). In the second half of the fight, Fundora upped the tempo and doubled down on aggression, landing hurtful power shots and eventually stopping Cruz to take her unbeaten record.

In Fundora's second fight of 2024, she took on Chile's Daniela Asenjo, who is 10 years her senior. Fundora won the fight in dominant fashion, showing patience and accuracy. Although the bout went the full 10 rounds, it could have been stopped anytime from Round 6 onward.

Her crowning achievement came in winning her final fight of 2024, when she made history as boxing's youngest undisputed champion of the four-belt era at just 22 years old, cementing her place in the sport's record books. Fundora faced off against Gabriela Celeste Alaniz, who proved to be a solid test, managing to put Fundora on the back foot (rarely seen) and catching her with solid right hands. Fundora remained composed throughout and in Round 7 landed a crunching straight left that sent the Argentine to the canvas and ended the contest.

We are always looking for boxing's next superstar, and Fundora has all the credentials to make her a worthy candidate. Her most striking attributes are her height and reach – standing at 5-foot-9, she towers over her flyweight opponents. You might think that with these physical assets, Fundora would choose to box on the back foot, keeping her shorter opponents at the end of her long levers. But you'd be wrong.

Fundora's fighting persona is all business, entering the ring with a "we don't get paid for overtime" mentality. Her jab serves a dual purpose: first as a rangefinder, methodically prodding opponents into position, and then as a ramrod that pierces through their guard. This power jab commands respect early, often shaking her opponents' confidence and causing fatal moments of hesitation. Fundora expertly capitalizes on these openings, following devastating left uppercuts to the body with hooks that whip upstairs – a southpaw duo that has become her signature.

Fundora's aggressive, high-volume fighting style, combined with her exceptional reach and long frame, draws compelling parallels to Thomas "The Hitman" Hearns. It's an apt comparison, as the legendary "Motor City Cobra" was also a master of leveraging his exceptional height and length while maintaining relentless pressure on his opponents.

Fundora's appeal extends well beyond her prowess in the ring. She embodies a compelling set of contrasts: exuding confidence without arrogance and balancing a warm, friendly demeanor with a ruthless competitive spirit. This duality is perfectly captured by her nickname "Sweet Poison" – as pleasant as she is outside the ring, she's lethal within it. Her authentic blend of approachability and fierce determination has made her a magnetic presence in the boxing world.

Fundora's rise in boxing has been meteoric. Her trajectory suggests an inevitable move through the weight divisions, potentially collecting more belts along the way – a path well-trodden by boxing's most legendary figures. However, what boxing truly needs is to see Fundora in matchups that capture the public's imagination. The sweet science has always shown us that for a champion to achieve true greatness, they need worthy dance partners to create memorable battles. There are former champions whose talents went largely unrecognized, and remain so to this day, due to a lack of opposition that could match their level. Larry Holmes exemplifies this phenomenon, as does Claressa Shields to a larger extent. The question now becomes: Who will step up to create those career-defining moments?

I suspect that Fundora will face off with Marlen Esparza, the former WBA, WBC, WBO and Ring Magazine flyweight champion who made history as the first American woman to qualify for Olympic boxing and went on to win bronze at the 2012 London Games. This matchup would be a strategic step in building Fundora's profile, and one that would likely showcase her physical advantages against the accomplished but smaller Esparza.

Some of women's boxing's biggest names are in the twilight of their careers. Katie Taylor (38), Amanda Serrano (36) and Natasha Jonas (40) will soon leave a void in the sport that will need to be filled. You'd be hard-pressed to find a better candidate for the future face of women's boxing than Gabriela Fundora. RING

DOWN IN HISTORY

THE SECOND OLEKSANDR USYK-TYSON FURY FIGHT SAW TWO MODERN HEAVYWEIGHT LEGENDS PUT THE FINISHING TOUCH ON AN ERA-DEFINING SAGA

By Gareth A Davies

The year rounded off with another heavyweight bonanza in Saudi Arabia, a befitting contest between giants of the sport's most globally significant, historical division. Two of boxing's modern stars collided again in a legacy fight on a momentous late December night at the Kingdom Arena.

Following a fascinating week of buildup in Riyadh, the spoils went to Ukrainian icon Oleksandr Usyk, who emerged as the imperious victor over Tyson Fury for a second time in what was truly an absorbing nonstop battle of fistic chess.

It was to be a unanimous decision for Usyk in this "Reignited" encounter – 116-112 on all three judges' cards – with the shorter, lighter fighter easing his way to victory in the second half of the contest by dint of giving as good as he received, plus a little more.

Just enough, but enough. Smart in the clinch, busier overall, Usyk was fully deserving of the win and with it entered a discussion around a newfound status as one of the greats of the modern era and one of the finest boxers the cruiserweight and heavyweight divisions have ever witnessed. There is a very strong argument, moreover, that Usyk is currently boxing's pound-for-pound king.

That said, this was a close fight – close enough that there was partisan noise around the wideness of the judging outcome. What is certain is that Usyk knows how to win and how to persuade three judges sitting on the ring apron to give him the tick in the box, round after round, time and time again.

This fight was less thrilling than the first, very dramatic fight, yet it was just as absorbing. The judges agreed on seven of the 12 rounds, with an argument over five swing rounds, not surprisingly. Of those seven unanimous rounds, the judges agreed 4 and 5 were Fury's rounds, and they agreed 6, 7, 8, 10 and 11 were for Usyk.

Fury, the challenger, brought imposing size and formidable skills ...

But it was that kind of fight, nip and tuck, and it is there, etched forever in a year that was special in boxing, with the 24 rounds the two heavyweight behemoths shared befitting of crowning the king of the era and the development of a new epicenter for boxing in Saudi Arabia.

There were diverse views on the contest. Voices that disagreed with the margin of Usyk's victory. Yet not on the victory itself.

Former undisputed heavyweight king Lennox Lewis said afterward that he wanted to see Fury "a little bit more aggressive and go after Usyk a bit more." But that was easier said than done.

Usyk was technically better in this fight than the first. So too Fury. But as Lewis explained: "Usyk won the first fight, and it was up to Fury to go after him in the second fight and make sure he won it. Usyk was hitting him to the body more ... they were scoring shots. I didn't score it round by round, but Fury should have got more rounds than he did."

For the record, from my seat, I scored it 6-5 in rounds to Usyk, with one – the first stanza – a 10-10.

(Left) Mark Robinson; (Right) Richard Pelham

(Left) Richard Pelham; (Right) Mark Robinson

In the fight week buildup, Lewis had told me: "They are in the middle of a war. They entertained us the first time, and they will entertain us again. They are focused on that. Fury will come back and fight. Usyk will focus on winning rounds. It is what he does. He is a scientist in there. He was with Fury for every second of the first fight. But I do believe the referee was very good [ruling a technical knockdown in the ninth round], and it ended up being a very good fight and has given us this second encounter."

Another modern great, Roy Jones Jr., had concurred with Lewis when I contacted him: "Usyk has the momentum, but we will find out who Fury really is in this fight. If Usyk fights the wrong fight and tries to knock Fury out, it could go wrong for him. I like Fury, but it's hard to go against Usyk, given what he came up with the last time."

Lewis added: "Usyk has proven that he is a winner. And he hasn't lost yet. So it is hard to go against him. But Fury is very focused this time. I saw it very close the first time, and I think we are in for a very close fight the second time."

Spot on from Lennox, and pretty much how it played out. And his post-fight report was nearly identical to the first time around: Lewis explained: "I didn't score it, but it was close. [Fury] should have got more rounds in there. Usyk could retire if he wants ... but Fury goes to London for one of the biggest fights in history with Anthony Joshua."

Time will tell on that matchup, especially given Fury's latest retirement announcement (Editor's note: see Tom Gray's article on that development in this issue), but given The Gypsy King's mercurial nature and the history of mega-money megafights, we ought to see it this summer.

... but Usyk, once again, outworked and outsmarted the former champ.

Speaking to trainer and commentator Teddy Atlas afterward – he was ringside – he saw Usyk as "completing the era" and showing he is "the full package" as an elite champion.

Yet for Atlas, Usyk was a clear winner. "The judges got it right; I don't understand the thinking that the judges made it a robbery."

Showing me his scribbled scorecard, Atlas explained: "Usyk had a bad fifth round, then from Round 6 he did what he did. He controlled the pace and tempo of the fight ... He bossed it."

Atlas grew animated in that endearing, passionate way of his: "Usyk dished out as good as he got. And to the body. If not a little better. He's the kind of guy who could have lived in any era, because he's the full package. He's technically solid. He's mentally solid. He's got the physical gifts. He's not 'great' great in one area, but he's very good in every area. Not one bad area, no weakness.

"As my mentor, Cus D'Amato, would say back in the day, the greatest compliment you can give a fighter is that he is 'solid,'" added Atlas. "A solid guy. On any night, this guy Usyk could fit in with anyone. Who's out there to beat Usyk? Just one opponent – Father Time. It would be interesting what

could happen against Daniel Dubois in a second fight. Dubois is a different guy now; he has redeemed himself, found himself. But if Usyk wanted to go off into the sunset… then he is there. He has achieved it all as a fighter."

Indeed, there can be little doubt about that, but delving further into Usyk's Ukrainian backdrop, he might just be the most politically symbolic boxer since Muhammad Ali, notwithstanding the work of his compatriots, the brothers Vitali and Wladimir Klitschko. All are deeply involved in the resistance against the Russian invasion of their country, which began in February 2022.

Usyk made his ring walk dressed in traditional Cossack robes. In a greatly symbolic gesture after the fight, Usyk produced a Cossack sword that had been passed to him in the ring.

I had been contacted prior to fight night by a Ukrainian organization that had brought the saber to Riyadh with great care and meticulousness. It was, as described by my contact, a "rare and collectable museum exhibit of legendary Ukrainian leader and Cossack Ivan Mazepa."

As they explained, Mazepa (1639-1709) "had been famous for standing up to Russia in the fight for Ukraine's independence."

The moment with the sword was to "showcase Ukraine's rich historical heritage and help restore Mazepa's name in modern times – a figure Russia has historically vilified as a traitor."

It was a moment of pageantry that would not have been lost on the Ukrainian people.

Alex Krassyuk, Usyk's promoter, explained that his fighter's resonance as a champion and a folkloric figure has grown exponentially in recent years, and as a symbol of hope in the face of the Russian invasion.

"Oleksandr knows that Ukraine should be the place of where a new civilization has to be reborn, where the western and the eastern world could come together and join their efforts to the point where Ukraine is and work for a better future, not fight for a better future … work together," Krassyuk told me.

Deep words enveloping a catastrophic scenario for many people over recent years.

Perhaps that has guided Usyk's mission in the ring: "You know, Oleksandr's philosophy is about being very helpful for other people," added Krassyuk, who is also Ukrainian.

"When he comes to the ring, it's his profession, so he has to fight and he has to win, but he doesn't have to hate his opponent.

"He loves his opponent, he respects him, and with a full heart of love he hits him according to the rules. But he doesn't feel this anger, he doesn't feel like he's doing damage. No, his objective is to win, and the less damage he does to his opponent the better. This is his philosophy."

Fascinating. Post-fight, Usyk acknowledged Fury to have been the toughest opponent of his career. Fury, meanwhile, believed he had won the contest – no bad thing given the sport will want to see him in the ring with Joshua for that huge sporting event for British – and global – fight fans in 2025.

If Usyk embodied the Cossack tradition, Fury's ring walk was more festive-themed, dressed in a Santa Claus costume accompanied by Mariah Carey's "All I Want for Christmas." Lighthearted perhaps, but it was hardly a mirror of his demeanor in fight week.

There were several keystone moments during what was a fascinating buildup in Riyadh – always involving grand set pieces – beginning with a media day on Monday in which Fury was less expansive than usual in putting forth theories on the Saturday fight night.

It was the usual talk, with Fury asserting that he would thrust Usyk into a "hurt locker" while looking for "destruction and damage."

The intent from "The Gypsy King" was to make it a more aggressive affair the second time around. Fury was solemn and carried a face of stone, a departure from being the entertainer, the jokester, for which he has also become known.

It was as if Fury was carrying a level of intensity comparable to what we had witnessed in his second fight with Deontay Wilder in February 2020, in Las Vegas. A heavier, more destructive force.

During this fight week, at the grand arrivals and the workouts, Fury completed his duties (in fact, he took 10 minutes in the ring at the workouts on a chilly evening, heavily clothed, and did not throw a glove on the pads with trainer SugarHill Steward). Yet when the two men came face-to-face at a small, packed hall on Thursday evening for the news conference at Via Riyadh, an upmarket mall near the Diplomatic Quarter, hell was finally unleashed between them.

On that night, with the black-tie dinner relaunch of The Ring Magazine just a short walk away after the news conference, the two fighters indulged in an 11-minute, 47-second staredown, unnerving in its intensity. They eventually had to be pulled apart, with neither man wanting to be the first to avert his eyes. Fury unleashed a torrent of expletives at his opponent while Usyk attempted to wind Fury up. Many believe this to be the longest staredown in boxing history.

Yet the fight and the event itself were truly ignited in that moment, with Fury's self-evident ire alongside Usyk's desire, as champion, to match the challenge.

There was more drama to follow. The weigh-in was replete with fans, Fury not stripping off and scaling 281 pounds, with Usyk a career-heaviest 226. That day, though, was hijacked by news of the "bushy beard" controversy.

The teams of Fury and Usyk had become embroiled in a bizarre row at their pre-fight weigh-in as the Ukrainian boxer's team claimed that the Briton's luxuriant beard had "grossly" violated the rules and demanded it be trimmed before the showdown.

Fury had grown the facial hair at his warm-weather training camp in Malta. However, the three sanctioning bodies – WBA, WBC and WBO – saw no issue with Fury's facial hair. But Krassyuk issued a strongly-worded statement.

"[The] beard rule is grossly violated. WBC rules clearly say 'a boxer may sport a trimmed beard and/or mustache as long as, in the discretion of the commission and the supervisor, the facial hair thickness does not: (1) cushion or in any way affect the impact or trajectory of punches; or (2) cause cuts or abrasions to his rival.'"

Krassyuk later said: "So, Tyson's beard has to be trimmed. We will push it further."

It was understood that Usyk's team had also placed a strongly worded submission with the Middle East Boxing Commission, which sanctions professional bouts in the region. However, Fury's promoter, Frank Warren, scoffed at the complaints. "He has a beard, and there's been a lot of fighters over the years who have fought with beards, and that's it," said Warren.

On fight night, as we all now know, the bushy beard remained. It had no bearing on the contest, either.

Nick Potts

Usyk raises a Cossack sword symbolic of Ukrainian freedom.

Trainer Andy Lee, in Fury's corner for both encounters between the two heavyweights in 2024, told me in mid-January, after all the fallout, with neither fighter's immediate future announced or decided, that fight fans must celebrate the two encounters, and the state of boxing, after 2024.

We did, after all, get the two leading heavyweights in the ring together twice in 2024, both momentous contests.

Lee told me: "Anything said about boxing before Riyadh Season, that the best weren't fighting the best, that they don't fight each other or that we were waiting for the biggest fights to happen or that promoters weren't cooperating with each other, can no longer be said. That has all changed, and we have Turki [Alalshikh] and Riyadh Season to thank for that.

"Look what boxing has produced in the last two years … so many great events. It's just phenomenal, and I think boxing fans are really lucky right now."

"We had two fantastic fights between Tyson and Usyk in 2024. The first fight was thrilling and with so much drama; the second fight, given the skill involved and the pace it was fought at, at that level, was incredible. Those two fights fit in history with Ali-Frazier, Ali-Foreman and the Lewis-Holyfield fights. It's right up there."

There can be no greater praise for Usyk and Fury, two great warriors. It was a pleasure and thrill to be there, witnessing both extraordinary boxers at work.

Gareth A Davies is boxing correspondent of the London Telegraph and TalkSPORT.

(Left) Alex Pantling; Mark Robinson

DOES SIZE MATTER?

BOTH TIMES OLEKSANDR USYK FACED TYSON FURY, CRITICS SAID THE UKRAINIAN WAS SIMPLY TOO SMALL TO WIN, DESPITE HIS SKILLS – BUT HISTORY TELLS A DIFFERENT STORY

By Anthony Cocks

When Oleksandr Usyk entered the ring at Kingdom Arena in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, to face Tyson Fury for the first time last May, there were a lot of question marks hanging over his head.

How would the former cruiserweight king negate Fury's seven-inch reach advantage? What would Usyk, at 6-foot-3, have to sacrifice to reach the chin of the 6-foot-9 Fury? What impact would Fury's nearly 40-pound weight advantage have on the outcome of the fight? And how could a moderate puncher like Usyk possibly hurt such a big lump as the towering Brit?

The common theory was that Fury's sheer size would be insurmountable. All he would have to do would be to lean his considerable bulk on his smaller opponent, rag-doll him around the ring and let him know who's the boss. After all, the rule of thumb in boxing is that a good big man beats a good small man. And both of these men had proven to be very good throughout their careers. But Usyk has always been the exception to the rule.

Over 12 fast-paced rounds, Usyk demonstrated that he was the superior boxer. The fight was close through eight rounds, but Usyk busted things open in the ninth when he scored the only knockdown of the fight. The Little Engine That Could pushed hard through the remaining quarter of the fight to claim a split decision and be crowned the undisputed heavyweight champion.

In the lead-up to the bout, Fury had taunted Usyk relentlessly. He called him a rabbit. A blown-up middleweight. A little sausage. But when the bell rang, the rabbit didn't run. The middleweight was not intimidated by his size. The little sausage did not leave Fury alone.

Fast-forward to the same arena seven months later. The same two men stood in the ring. When the gong sounded, Fury proved to be in superb condition. He was up on his toes, moving and feinting, looking to create his openings. But despite his 55-pound weight advantage, he couldn't make his size count. Usyk controlled center ring. He dictated the range. And for much of the fight, he walked Fury down. Any time that Fury did have success, Usyk found another gear to snatch the momentum away from him.

The 116-112 scorecards across the board were an accurate reflection of the fight. Usyk proved the first win was no fluke. A good little man can beat a good big man.

Unlike his friend Wladimir Klitschko, Usyk is not a modern-sized heavyweight.

The Ukrainian's pair of victories over Fury may have come as a shock to some, given the size difference, but not everyone was surprised.

"Usyk's performances in both fights were impressive, but honestly, it's not surprising," said Chris Byrd, who held the WBO and IBF heavyweight titles in two separate reigns in the first half of the 2000s. "A lot of people have doubted his ability to handle the big guys, but he's shown what skill, speed and ring IQ can do. In that second fight against Fury, he was able to neutralize Tyson's size and jab with his footwork and angles. It's about understanding the nuances of boxing.

"When you're smaller, you can't just go in there swinging; you have to have technique and you've gotta make every movement count. Usyk's style is a master class in how to outsmart a guy who's got that physical advantage. That's the beauty of boxing: Size doesn't always rule if you know how to use what you've got. When I came into the heavyweight division, I was a smaller fighter compared to my opponents, but my mentality and techniques overpowered and helped me to become a world champion twice."

Few people know how to box bigger opponents quite like Byrd. After turning professional at 169 pounds in 1993, he fought as a heavyweight in just his fourth bout. He boxed almost exclusively in the open weight class after that, facing some genuine monsters in the division, including Ike Ibeabuchi, David Tua and the dual powerhouses of boxing brothers Wladimir and Vitali Klitschko. All of them were either bigger, heavier or more powerful than him – sometimes all three.

"I loved it. I went in the ring with the mentality that I was going to win, and their sizes never put fear in me," said Byrd, a 6-foot-1 southpaw who rarely came into the ring at more than 215 pounds. "And I fought some big, strong guys during my time. When you're facing someone who's 6-foot-6 and pushing 240-250 pounds, you realize real quick that you've got to work harder just to keep up and sometimes take in harder punches compared to the middleweight division.

"The size of these guys can overwhelm you if you let it, but that just wasn't my thinking. It's a challenge to deal with a guy who can stand in front of you and throw a jab like a piston

Torsten Silz

David Haye used speed, boxing skills and a big dose of caution to win a majority decision over the giant Nikolai Valuev.

"When you're smaller, you can't just go in there swinging; you have to have technique and you've gotta make every movement count."

or lean on you all night. The key was always to stay smart and stay in good shape. You can't outpower someone like that, but you can outthink them, outlast them, and outmove them."

By the time Byrd lost the IBF title to the 6-foot-6, 241-pound nemesis Wladimir Klitschko in 2006 (in 2000, Wlad also took Byrd's WBO belt, which Byrd had won by stopping an injured Vitali), it seemed like the days of the moderate-sized heavyweight were behind us. Ukraine's Klitschko would be the dominant force in boxing's flagship division for almost a decade, until he ran into an even bigger man in Fury in 2015.

Other big men joined the fray. Fury's fellow Brit Anthony Joshua, coming in at 6-foot-6 and 243 pounds, picked up the IBF belt in 2016 and also retired Klitschko – who was coming to the end of his career – the following year.

Across the Atlantic, Deontay Wilder was making a name for himself by knocking out opponents left, right and center. Standing at 6-foot-7 and typically weighing between 215-230 pounds, what the WBC titleholder lacked in bulk was more than compensated for with his concussive power.

For seven years, Fury, Joshua and Wilder ruled the division. The only real question was who would be the next big man to take over the open weight class once these three boxers got old or retired.

The answer was one that few saw coming.

"Back in the 2000s, there was a lot of talk about big guys taking over, and you couldn't argue with the success of the Klitschkos, Lennox [Lewis] and, later, Fury. But here's the thing: Boxing always has a way of proving those theories wrong," said Byrd.

"I never bought into the idea that the heavyweight division was going to become exclusively for the 6-foot-6 giants. I mean, look at me and my career. I am 6-foot-1 and my opponents were huge compared to me. I think my career alone should show that this thought should be thrown out of discussions. And look at the past with Muhammad Ali, Larry Holmes, Joe Frazier – they weren't giants, but they still dominated.

"My only sparring partner for my Evander Holyfield fight, Paul Nutall, was 5-foot-11, and during our training he gave me a run for my money and helped contribute to my win. So while the super-heavyweights have been a force, there will always be a place for smaller heavyweights who are skilled and smart. You don't need to be 6-foot-6 to win the title – you just need to be a complete, tough, intelligent fighter."

Byrd makes a sound argument. Yet there are still people who are astounded that a smaller heavyweight can not only compete with bigger men, but beat them.

Midway through the 10th round of the DAZN broadcast of Usyk-Fury II, commentator Adam Smith posed a question to analyst Barry Jones:

"Has there been a fighter of Usyk's size with a better ring IQ? You can't think of many."

There was a pregnant pause before Jones deadpanned: "Muhammad Ali."

Jones was right. But the list is much more exhaustive than just Ali and Usyk.

"The thing is, one size doesn't fit all," said veteran broadcaster and Ring contributor Al Bernstein. "Most responsible people evaluating boxing are not going to suggest that Evander Holyfield, for instance, who came up from cruiserweight, or Muhammad Ali, or even Mike Tyson, who's the smallest heavyweight champion at 5-foot-10, wouldn't be competitive against anybody or couldn't beat bigger men.

"I look at it this way: The size advantage of some of the bigger heavyweights does make it difficult trying to imagine Rocky Marciano facing Lennox Lewis. That is a real stretch of the imagination to me because of the size difference. But I'll tell you another reason why: There are other bigger heavyweights, and then there's Lennox Lewis. In my opinion, Lennox Lewis is the gold standard of big heavyweights. Everybody else is different.

"For example, I think Tyson Fury is a very talented fighter who uses his size and length pretty well. He presents issues for some of the really smaller heavyweights of the past, but that doesn't mean that, as Usyk showed, that the smaller heavyweights couldn't counteract that."

Bernstein hastened to add that being smaller, quicker and more agile wasn't always an instant advantage, any more than being taller and heavier is. Success comes where size and skill intersect.

"Some of it has to do with Usyk's excellence, which we have to give him [credit] for," he said. "But the size difference only matters in certain instances, and it matters more when the heavyweight who is really big is equipped with great things, like Lewis was."

History shows us that Usyk's physical dimensions compare favorably to past champions too. Of the 21 boxers who have held the Ring Magazine heavyweight championship between 1922 until the end of the 1980s, only one was taller than 6-foot-3 – the aptly nicknamed "Ambling Alp," Primo Carnera. The average height of the

champions across this period was just a shade over 6-foot-1. The numbers since Lennox Lewis' reign paint a different picture. The average height of the four Ring Magazine champions before Usyk was 6-foot-6¾. This puts the average height of all Ring Magazine heavyweight champions at 6-foot-2.

Many men considered giants in the past were no bigger than Usyk. Muhammad Ali, George Foreman and Larry Holmes were all 6-foot-3. [Editor's note: Stats are from BoxRec.com; other sources have listed Foreman and Holmes as 6-foot-4.] When Ali first beat Sonny Liston to win the world title in 1964, he weighed 210½ pounds. In Foreman's first world title fight against Joe Frazier in 1973, he scaled 217½ pounds. Holmes weighed in at 209 pounds ahead of the fight against Ken Norton that delivered him the WBC championship in 1978.

"Back in the 2000s, there was a lot of talk about big guys taking over, and you couldn't argue with the success of the Klitschkos, Lennox [Lewis] and, later, Fury."

"People keep talking about Usyk being 'small' at 6-foot-3 and 225 pounds, but when you compare him to guys like Muhammad Ali or Larry Holmes, he's pretty average," said Byrd. "These guys were all either the same size or in the same range, and they ruled the division in their primes.

"The narrative that Usyk is small is kind of misleading. What really sets him apart is his speed, his ability to move in and out of range and his boxing IQ. His size might be on the lower end for today's heavyweights, but it's not what makes him special. It's how he uses his size and skill to win fights."

Bernstein believes that many smaller heavyweights of the past would be successful today, including Joe Frazier, who came in half an inch shy of 6 feet.

"We saw Joe Frazier struggle against George Foreman, a big-punching large man, but that was also at a certain point in his career where I think he might have been diminished a little bit," said Bernstein. "It all depends on who they fight. But look, no one's going to tell me that Joe Frazier, if he weighed 210 or 215 pounds or whatever his heaviest weight was, that he couldn't compete. You can't tell me that he's not going to go in there and give Kubrat Pulev and Daniel Dubois and Filip Hrgovic and all those guys a fight. You can't tell me that simply because they're bigger than him, he's not going to be a force against them."

STAN HONDA

Byrd (right) was at a four-inch, 56-pound "disadvantage" when he beat Jameel McCline to defend his IBF title in 2004.

Usyk has proven himself to be a generational talent and perhaps, when the dust has settled on his illustrious career, an all-time great. He has a superb blend of size and speed, fast feet and clever feints, and he can cut the sort of angles that bigger men are not accustomed to defending against. Combine these attributes with a cunning mentality and high ring IQ, and it makes him close to a perfect heavyweight champion.

"I think Usyk is definitely an outlier right now in terms of size, but I wouldn't be surprised if we start to see more fighters in that 6-foot-3 to 6-foot-4, 220- to 230-pound range rise in the future. I hope so. The times are always changing and you just never know, and I wouldn't be surprised," said Byrd.

"With my own experiences I faced regarding size many years ago in my career and this still being a big topic in this sport, there's always going to be a debate about size versus skill. But my take is that too much emphasis is placed on size in today's heavyweight division.

"Look, having a huge reach, size or big power is an advantage, no doubt. But we've seen time and time again, and I myself have proven this, that skill trumps size. I was called 'Slip Master' and 'Rapid Fire' for a reason: skills! You don't need to be the biggest guy in the ring – you need to be the smartest, the most prepared and the most adaptable. Boxing isn't always about being the strongest; it's about being the best fighter. Size can help, but skill is king."

So where does the future of the division lie? A quick glance at the current Ring Magazine heavyweight rankings shows six fighters who are 6-foot-6 or taller, and two more who are 6-foot-5. Usyk has already gone through three of the biggest bodies in the division – Fury twice, Joshua twice and Dubois – proving there is still a place for medium-sized boxers in the sport's glamor division.

Asked to put skill aside for a moment and describe the perfect build for a modern heavyweight, Byrd replied: "I would say this doesn't matter. But if I had to pick the ideal physical dimensions for a modern heavyweight, based on the boxing world's standards, in my opinion it would probably be somewhere in that 6-foot-3 to 6-foot-5 range and around 230 pounds. You've got enough size to be competitive with the giants, but you're still quick enough to move and avoid taking too many risks."

At 38, Usyk won't be around forever. But don't be surprised if we see a second generation of midsized heavyweights follow in his footsteps, keen to keep proving that size is just a number.

MARTIN BAKOLE:

THE "WHO NEEDS HIM?" CLUB

BIG, SKILLFUL, PACKS A SERIOUS PUNCH … WHAT DOES HEAVYWEIGHT BOXING'S NO. 1 DANGER MAN HAVE TO DO TO GET A WORLD TITLE FIGHT?

By Tom Gray

It was a 20-minute drive from my home to a boxing gym in Easterhouse, which is a tough suburb of Glasgow, Scotland. How tough? It's the kind of place where the police walk around in pairs – and that's inside the station.

In early January, during mid-winter, the weather is equally tough, well below freezing. A thin layer of pure white frost covers the pavement outside the gym, with an uneven, icy path toward the doorway particularly perilous. Making it inside without slipping and breaking my neck was a relief.

The gym is like any other. It's a place of work full of genuine boxing people – trainers and professional fighters – going about their business. I introduce myself and engage in some

Photography by SHABBA SHAFIQ | SWTSCNC

Bakole brutally KO'd Jared Anderson in his U.S. debut.

Mark Robinson

light conversation before a 6-foot-6, 280-pound colossus enters the building.

It's Martin Bakole – The Ring's No. 6-rated heavyweight.

In Scotland, heavyweights don't grow on trees. Bakole, 33, hails from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and moved here to train with venerable boxing coach Billy Nelson seven years ago. Despite the climate being decidedly different from back home, Bakole has applied enough heat in the division to accumulate a 21-1 (16 KOs) record. His only setback was a 10th-round stoppage defeat to American Michael Hunter when his performance was badly hampered by an injury to his right shoulder. That was all the way back in October 2018.

Nelson, who took Scotsman Ricky Burns to two of three divisional world titles over a decade ago, is not present at the gym on this day. Bakole is in early training for May's IBF final eliminator against Nigerian export Efe Ajagba, who is rated No. 10 by The Ring.

After shaking out and using a variety of resistance bands, Bakole does a little shadowboxing before being put through arduous stretching routines that take him well beyond the limit of discomfort. He uses an ab roller and then selects the largest heavy bag in the gym to sharpen the tools of his trade.

As the rounds go by, Bakole increases the power of his punches. Standing 20 feet away, I could feel the vibration of the shots traveling from the soles of my feet to my knees and soon realized why previously unbeaten American Jared Anderson succumbed to a pulverizing five-round beatdown in Los Angeles last August.

"When I dropped Anderson in the first round, I didn't rush," Bakole told The Ring after his workout. "He's young and I've watched him before, especially with [Charles] Martin, who he beat on points. I knew after five or six rounds that he'd be knocked out. It wasn't going 10 rounds.

"I took it easy and was preparing for the uppercut – that was the best punch. I can stop anybody with that punch. If you watch George Foreman, he was the best with the uppercut. I learned a lot from that. In the first round [with Anderson], you'll see I don't throw the uppercut a lot, because I know he's keeping his distance. When I close my distance, you'll get it because you don't see it."

The game plan for disposing of Anderson via uppercut was constructed over several weeks. The element of surprise was accentuated by a fatal flaw when Anderson dropped his right hand while in the orthodox stance in Round 5. "The left uppercut, the second knockdown, Jared Anderson didn't see it because he'd blinded himself with his right-hand glove," said Nelson during a telephone interview later that day. "It was nice to see all that hard work have such an effect."

However, despite all the plaudits Bakole has received, this career-best win over Anderson has become something of a hindrance. On a card that featured pound-for-pound great Terence Crawford winning a fourth divisional title, it was Bakole who sent shockwaves through the sport with a devastating display of power and accuracy.

Suddenly, the phone stopped ringing and, much in line with the Scottish weather, Bakole was out in the cold. Despite lofty top 5 ratings with all four sanctioning organizations, a matchup against one of the division elites was not forthcoming, and the wait continues. One can only surmise that no one wants to make the same mistake Anderson did. The risk is not worth the reward.

"People are suddenly saying Jared Anderson is a bum, but listen, he's an extremely good fighter," stressed Nelson. "To say otherwise is demeaning to Martin's performance.

"Jared Anderson will go on to win a world title irrespective of this defeat. He's 25 years old, which is a baby in the heavyweight division. If they get him a good fight – somebody like Filip Hrgovic or Fabio Wardley – he'll beat Wardley hands down."

Bakole expects to beat Ajagba hands down in his next fight. However, before agreeing to that bout, the hard-hitting Congolese had called for a fight against British superstar Anthony Joshua. Unfortunately, those requests were ignored, with "AJ" understandably opting for a chance to become a three-time heavyweight champion.

In September, just before his stunning fifth-round knockout loss to IBF titleholder Daniel Dubois, I conducted a one-on-one interview with Joshua in London for The Sporting News. I asked "AJ" if a fight on the African continent remained a realistic proposition, given his Nigerian heritage, and he replied, "Maybe if I fight Martin Bakole."

NELSON'S CORNER

Bakole's longtime trainer-manager, Billy Nelson, explains why his fighter is making the other members of boxing's glamor division look in a different direction:

"The first time I saw Martin Bakole, I knew he was a bit special. The first spar he did in my old gym was with (former Commonwealth bronze medalist and professional cruiserweight) Stephen Simmons. After the first round, Simmons came back to me and said, 'He's exceptional. He'll win a world title.' That was after the first round! Simmons couldn't hit him with a bag of rice.

"Martin had no footwork [before working with me]. He had fast hands and good IQ, but his footwork was atrocious. He didn't know how to cut a ring off, but he does now. His balance wasn't great, but it is now. His movement was always good, as in head and waist movement.

"We've not seen the best of Martin yet. I've seen some stuff from him in the gym that is just jaw-dropping. His ring generalship is second to none.

"He'll win the world title, and I can see him unifying, but we need to be given the chance. We're not getting the chance because the promoters know. I've got all the respect in the world for Frank [Warren], but he knows what happened to Daniel Dubois [in sparring]. He just can't come out and say it. And Eddie [Hearn] would look very foolish after having signed Martin and not giving him another contract because we left 258 [Management].

"I just want Martin to put on another scintillating performance against Efe Ajagba. I want people in prominent positions in the sport to give the man his opportunity. He thoroughly deserves it now. It's not his fault that Zhilei Zhang and Agit Kabayel decided to do their own thing (Zhang declined to face Bakole in an IBF final eliminator, opting instead to take on Kabayel on February 22). Fair play to them, and they'll earn a lot of money. We don't care about the money side of it; we just want the opportunity.

"I was asked the other day if the Dubois-Parker winner fights Usyk, would we fight Zhang or Kabayel? Well, of course we would. We were willing to fight them in an IBF final eliminator. If Martin beat Zhang or Kabayel, we'd be in a position where he'd be interim champion with the WBC, mandatory challenger with the IBF, number two with the WBA and still not have a world title fight."

Bakole's goals: Win a world title, defend it in Africa.

"I was surprised that he said he wanted to fight me in Africa," Bakole told The Ring. "My president (Felix Tshisekedi) and His Excellency (Turki Alalshikh) could maybe do that fight. My president called me and said he was looking forward to that and asked how much money [Joshua] would want. They sent someone to AJ's team and he asked for crazy money, but Africa is not like Saudi Arabia. They don't have lots of money.

"My country is at war, and the government is putting a lot of money into stopping Rwanda from killing innocent people. Imagine AJ asking for a hundred million. My president was looking forward to organizing that fight because, like me, he loves boxing. AJ asked for crazy money, and I understand, because he doesn't want the fight. I also responded [on social media] because he said Ajagba would beat me. He should stay quiet when he's asked that question. He's talking shit."

Both Bakole and Nelson are understandably frustrated. Politics in boxing was there long before they began their journey, and it will be there long after it's concluded. However, the pair's ambition and dedication remain intact, and they are fully invested in being ready when the time comes.

"When we win the world title – not if we win it – and Martin has a title defense in Kinshasa, you'll have over 100,000 people there," Nelson estimated. "Four hundred thousand-plus welcomed him back from the Anderson fight. It was quite scary.

"Last October was the 50th anniversary of 'The Rumble in the Jungle,' and it's a shame that we missed that. If they do it next year, OK, it's the 51st anniversary, but it would still be huge. And they've got a new stadium in Kinshasa (reconstruction recently finished on the Pentecost Martyrs Stadium)."

Just before my interview with Bakole concluded, he became very emotional when further discussing the decades-long conflict between his country and neighboring Rwanda. The latest offensive began in March 2022, with approximately two million people displaced and hundreds killed.

"Imagine you see them killing your brother, your mum, your dad. I went there and I see all that suffering. That makes me crazy, especially when I'm in the ring," Bakole said as his head dropped. "I have my flag and all of that comes into my head. Millions of people have died already [since the 1990s], and they're innocent. They know nothing about it – that's politics."

Like Oleksandr Usyk, whose beloved Ukraine was invaded by Russian forces, Bakole is motivated by more than just world championships and money. When Usyk was in trouble against Tyson Fury in their first fight, we saw him reach down deep inside himself and draw on something more powerful than stamina and endurance. He was galvanized by his position as a beacon of hope for his people.

The tears that welled up in Bakole's eyes when he talked about the plight of his countrymen speak of someone familiar with very dark places and the willingness to fight his way out of them in the ring. If he keeps on winning in style, then the division elite will no longer be able to ignore what many perceive to be the most avoided heavyweight in world boxing. RING

KNOW YOUR ENEMY

At the time of writing, Bakole was rated No. 6 by The Ring at heavyweight. During our one-on-one discussion, the hard-hitting contender offered his thoughts on his Ring-rated contemporaries and gave them a score out of 10.

***The Ring* Champion:**
Oleksandr Usyk

"He's the best right now; he's the king. He's clever and he's a tough guy, but his movement makes him special. He's got beautiful movement. But when you can stop that movement, you'll beat him. I know how to stop him!"

Score: 9/10

#1
Tyson Fury

"He's maybe in decline now. He's lost twice [to Usyk]. I thought the last one was a draw, but it was a close fight and they probably just gave it to the champion."

Score: 6/10

#2
Daniel Dubois

"He's going up the way. He's got a little bit older. When you're young, you may think you can't do it. He's mature now and he's found someone in the corner that can tell him what to do (Don Charles)."

Score: 7/10

#3
Joseph Parker

"He's done well, beating [Deontay] Wilder and [Zhilei] Zhang. Parker lost confidence after losing to Joshua, [Joe] Joyce and [Dillian] Whyte. Andy Lee is a good trainer, and now Parker looks better than ever."

Score: 8/10

#4
Zhilei Zhang

"'Big Bang' (laughs) … He doesn't throw enough punches, but he's tough and he's got a beautiful backhand. If you take that away, look at what happened when he fought Parker. If you stay away from that backhand or block it, he's finished."

Score: 5/10

#5
Agit Kabayel

"He hasn't fought at the level he's supposed to fight. Arslanbek [Makhmudov] was still coming through. The big fight will be against Zhang. If he stops Zhang, then I'll rate him higher."

Score: 4/10

#7
Anthony Joshua

"He looks good, but boxing isn't just about looking good. It's not just about muscles; it's about your brain and everything. I think with the loss to Andy Ruiz, he lost some confidence. Everyone knows his weakness."

Score: 2/10

#8
Filip Hrgovic

"Hrgovic? He's finished. Well, maybe not finished, but he's not in the rankings. Maybe he can come back, but he's easy to hit. He needs to protect himself."

Score: 1/10

#9
Fabio Wardley

"I don't know anything about him. He took my place [at No. 1 in the WBA ratings], I think because he fought twice in a year. I'm surprised that someone who was not even in the top 10 goes straight to number one. Maybe it's because I've gone to the IBF, but I don't know. He did well against Frazer [Clarke], but is not at the level."

Score: 1/10

#10
Efe Ajagba

"He's got power, but that power is like a jab to me. I'm the best, and this is my time. He has no chance. He knows how to box, but it's so hard to handle me. I'm a machine. This is a big fight for me. If I knock him out or win on points, then I can focus on either Daniel Dubois or Joseph Parker. I'm asking His Excellency to do this in Africa because he's never held an event like this in Africa."

Score: 1/10

RING

Mark Robinson

Can Terence Crawford pull off the upset against the much-heavier Canelo Alvarez, just as Manny Pacquiao shocked Oscar De La Hoya in 2008?

TRUE GRIT

TERENCE CRAWFORD'S TWO-DIVISION JUMP FOR A POTENTIAL CLASH WITH CANELO ALVAREZ IS A PROVEN FORMULA THAT SELLS ITSELF IN A WORLD OF SAFETY-FIRST STARS

By Keith Idec

Freddie Roach had an epiphany one night late in the summer of 2008.

Until then, Manny Pacquiao's protective trainer was adamantly against the Filipino superstar moving up two weight classes to oppose Oscar De La Hoya, a former middleweight and junior middleweight champion Roach had trained, at 147 pounds. Roach recognized that Pacquiao possessed superior speed and athleticism, but the powerful southpaw had fought only once at the lightweight limit of 135 pounds prior to promoter Bob Arum offering him a huge payday to square off against one of the sport's transcendent icons.

A reminiscent narrative is now playing out a bit further up the scale as Terence Crawford, who has defeated all comers in his rise from 135 to 154 pounds, prepares to challenge 168-pound champion and Mexican superstar Canelo Alvarez. The similarities are worth studying.

Pacquiao, who stands four-plus inches shorter than De La Hoya, stopped David Diaz in the ninth round of his lightweight debut in June 2008. Before he defeated Diaz, however, Pacquiao competed exclusively at the junior lightweight limit of 130 pounds for more than three years.

Pacquiao, a training fanatic, easily adjusted to the extra five pounds when he encountered Diaz, a fellow southpaw who struggled with the future eight-division champion's power and speed. Jumping up two more weight classes to face De La Hoya was "another animal altogether," according to Roach.

"This was a whole new ballgame," Roach told The Ring, "because Manny was moving up another two divisions against not just a naturally bigger man but one of the top pound-for-pound fighters of his era. To make that adjustment from lightweight to welterweight without a tune-up fight, Manny had to adjust his meals. He was put on a custom 7,000-calorie diet to gain the proper amount of weight and to make sure he wasn't gaining unnecessary weight.

"Our biggest concern was maintaining the weight he was gaining, which was a challenge because Manny's workouts in the gym would last three to four hours with no breaks. And that was in addition to the morning roadwork and drills. Without increasing the amount of food Manny was now eating, in consultation with a strength and nutritional coach, Manny could have easily been a lightweight when he fought Oscar. As it was, Manny was only 142 when he fought Oscar."

Pacquiao, then 29, wasn't the only one who came in significantly under the contracted welterweight limit for their HBO Pay-Per-View showdown at MGM Grand Garden Arena in December 2008. An overzealous De La Hoya, hell-bent on proving he could comfortably get down to that weight again, oddly stepped on the Nevada State Athletic Commission's scale at 145 pounds, his lowest weight in nearly 12 years.

The 35-year-old De La Hoya was widely touted as too big and too strong for Pacquiao, who weighed 106 pounds for his pro debut almost 14 years earlier. But "PacMan" proved throughout the stunningly one-sided bout that an apparently overtrained De La Hoya was entirely too slow and stationary to deal with a uniquely dynamic fighter like him.

Pacquiao led by huge margins on the scorecards of judges Adelaide Byrd (80-71), Stanley Christodoulou (79-72) and Dave Moretti (80-71) when De La Hoya declined to leave his corner for the ninth round.

"I don't believe the weight was a factor for Oscar," Roach said. "No matter how much Oscar weighed, Manny was not going to be denied. I had the better game plan and the better fighter. No one could have survived Manny on that night."

Arum, Pacquiao's longtime promoter and De La Hoya's former promoter by the time they fought, was one of the few industry insiders who wasn't the least bit surprised that Pacquiao demolished De La Hoya.

"I assumed that Manny would be able to handle Oscar the way he did," Arum told The Ring. "I thought he even handled him better than I imagined he would. But I was always confident in

that fight, that Manny was going to win and embarrass Oscar. I said it. People may not have believed me, but I said it leading up to the fight. When they had the press conference after the fight, I said the press said it would be a mismatch, and it was a mismatch – making a joke of it. But again, Manny had so many advantages over Oscar at that point in Oscar's career; the fact that Oscar was bigger was the only thing Oscar had going for him."

De La Hoya retired following his lopsided loss to Pacquiao. He contemplated coming back numerous times, though he never went through with those fights.

Arum doesn't believe Crawford – whom his company, Top Rank Inc., also promoted for most of his career – will have nearly as easy a time with Alvarez as Pacquiao did with De La Hoya. The 93-year-old Hall of Fame promoter does, however, believe Crawford has a legitimate opportunity to upset the Mexican legend when they meet sometime in September.

"That fight is much more competitive than people would think," Arum said. "Canelo is the bigger man, but… Crawford has this one real thing that nobody Canelo has fought has, and that's that he is totally ambidextrous. He can throw a lot of fighters off doing that, because fighters like to prepare in training for either a righty or a lefty. And if the fighter is truly ambidextrous and switches without problems in the middle of a fight, he creates tremendous problems for the opponent. And I don't know that Canelo has ever dealt with that kind of puzzle. The only reason why I think it may not be that much of a problem for Canelo is Terence is also a fighter with a little age on him. And he's even been less active than Canelo, and that hurts."

Crawford, unlike Pacquiao when he battled De La Hoya, is actually older than Alvarez by 3½ years. If their 12-round, 168-pound title fight takes place September 13, as Crawford and others have indicated, the former undisputed welterweight champ will be 15 days short of his 38th birthday.

Alvarez, who would be 35 at that point, will first have to get through a tune-up match on May 3. His probable opponent, according to what sources have told The Ring, will be Cuban-born William Scull (23-0, 9 KOs), who won the IBF super middleweight title Alvarez vacated last year by beating Russia's Vladimir Shishkin unanimously on points in October.

Alvarez, who is commonly considered boxing's undisputed super middleweight champion, already owns the Ring, WBA, WBC and WBO 168-pound titles. He ultimately embraced the idea of facing Crawford, which is generally regarded as a high-risk, low-reward proposition in terms of legacy, because he will likely be paid a purse of at least $100 million as part of a three-fight deal with Riyadh Season.

Crawford holds the WBA junior middleweight title. The former Ring/WBO lightweight and undisputed junior welterweight champion is ranked No. 3

Many feared that De La Hoya would seriously hurt Pacquiao. Are critics of the Canelo-Crawford clash making the same mistake?

Ethan Miller

Floyd Mayweather Jr. outclassed a 23-year-old Alvarez in 2013.

on The Ring's top 10 pound-for-pound list, four spots above the seventh-rated Alvarez.

Like Pacquiao at lightweight before he challenged De La Hoya, Crawford has only competed once at junior middleweight. The Nebraskan's performance in that fight drew criticism, yet Crawford legitimately beat Uzbekistan's Israil Madrimov – a strong, career-long junior middleweight – on all three scorecards on August 3 at BMO Stadium in Los Angeles.

Unless Crawford takes an interim match before he challenges Alvarez, he also will advance two divisions to take what, at least on paper, appears to be the most difficult fight of his 16-year professional career. At least one of Alvarez's conquests, Josesito Lopez, suspects Crawford's diverse skill set and ring IQ will enable him to make the fight competitive before Alvarez eventually becomes too much for him.

"I think he might be too small to beat Canelo," Lopez told independent journalist Sean Zittel. "But I don't think he's too small to [not] make it a good, interesting fight for the first half to two-thirds of the fight. But I think eventually the size will be too much."

Alvarez's size was too much for Lopez when he moved up to junior middleweight to face Alvarez in September 2012. Lopez, of Riverside, California, mostly competed at or slightly above the junior welterweight maximum of 140 pounds prior to his shot at Alvarez's WBC 154-pound crown.

An aggressive Alvarez overwhelmed Lopez, who was knocked down in the second, third and fourth rounds before Canelo stopped him in the fifth round. Though Alvarez (62-2-2, 39 KOs) has more preofessional experience than Crawford (41-0, 31 KOs) – including the physical wear and tear that comes with it – Lopez expects the Guadalajara native to handle another of the best boxers of this generation.

"I think Canelo has more than enough in the tank to beat a great, skilled fighter like Crawford," Lopez said.

To Crawford's credit, he has made it clear through his social media platforms that he did not request a rehydration clause during negotiations conducted by Turki Alalshikh to limit how much weight Alvarez could put on between the weigh-in and fight night.

"[Crawford] doesn't drink or smoke. He's always focused, keeps himself in tremendous shape. ... Canelo is obviously an all-time great, but it will be a great fight."

Crawford criticized Gervonta Davis because the WBA lightweight titleholder made Ryan Garcia come down to a catchweight of 136 pounds and insisted upon a rehydration clause that limited Garcia to adding no more than 10 pounds prior to a second-day weigh-in. Davis knocked Garcia out with a body shot in the seventh round of their April 2023 bout.

Leonard Ellerbe, former longtime CEO of Mayweather Promotions and Davis' adviser, considers Crawford's challenge much different than the task Floyd Mayweather Jr. embraced when he challenged Alvarez for his Ring/WBC 154-pound championship in September 2013.

"Floyd's walk-around weight was how he trained," Ellerbe told The Ring. "So he never had to be in a situation where he had to lose weight. He would walk around, let's say, at 150. Therefore, he trained and boxed every camp at his walk-around weight. That allowed him to be very, very strong, because he was able to eat the way he ate when he wasn't training for a fight. The key to him being as successful as he was, was that he didn't have to lose any weight, where he would deplete himself. He was very, very strong because his walk-around weight was his fighting weight."

Mayweather was dominant against Alvarez, despite ringside judge CJ Ross absurdly scoring the 12-round bout a draw, 114-114. But there are important differences between Mayweather-Alvarez and Alvarez-Crawford. Mayweather only moved up from the welterweight maximum of 147 pounds to a catchweight of 152 to face Alvarez in their Showtime Pay-Per-View main event, whereas Crawford's jump from the junior middleweight maximum of 154 pounds to super middleweight could be as much as 14 pounds.

One advantage Ellerbe thinks Crawford possesses, however, is that he has always taken a completely professional approach to his career, much like Mayweather.

"Crawford is also a very disciplined fighter," Ellerbe said. "He doesn't drink or smoke. He's always focused, keeps himself in tremendous shape. So those things are very similar. Canelo is obviously an all-time great, but it will be a great fight."

Arum won't be involved in Alvarez-Crawford from a promotional standpoint, but he doesn't think it'll be difficult for Alalshikh or anyone else involved to sell a bout that has already captivated the collective imagination of the boxing public.

"If you tell the truth," Arum said, "and tell why the guy is coming up to fight a guy who is in the higher weight category, then you tell the people why he has a good chance to win. If you're sincere in that, it'll come through, and people can believe it or not believe it. There's no trick in promoting that. You just say what you feel and why you feel it's a good fight for your fighter coming up in weight, and you let it go at that. There's not a roadmap to promoting that. You just tell the truth." RING

Keith Idec is a senior writer and columnist for The Ring. He can be reached on X @idecboxing.

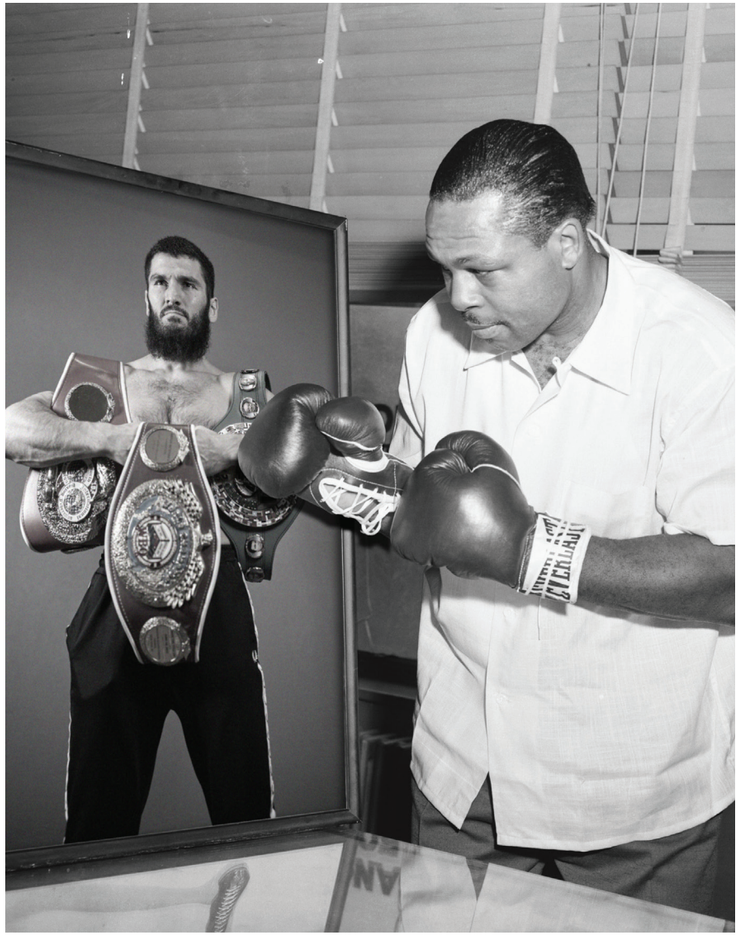
ARTUR BETERBIEV VS. ARCHIE MOORE

A FANTASY FIGHT FOR THE UNDISPUTED LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP

By Ron Lipton

Ron Lipton was inducted into the New York State and New Jersey Boxing Halls of Fame as a veteran pro referee, boxing historian and record-setting amateur boxer. He was a paid sparring partner to Rubin "Hurricane" Carter, Dick Tiger, Carlos Ortiz and even Muhammad Ali, a lifelong friend, among other top contenders of the 1960s.

Lipton is proud to present the eighth installment of his Mythical Matchup series for The Ring.



Both are nice guys, but Moore and Beterbiev are also savvy power-hitters in the ring.

FIGHTER BACKGROUNDS

We are dealing with two of the most dynamic light heavyweight champions in boxing history in a battle of old school vs. new school.

This Mythical Matchup will be conducted on the best night either man ever had. Historical boxing figures from different eras will be placed in the fantasy fight for your entertainment. I am matching Moore and Beterbiev at a fictional moment in time when they both enter the ring with the sum total of their fistic knowledge from all their fights. They will both be 39 years old when they share the ring.

I had the honor and pleasure of spending several hours alone with Archie Moore, who was 77 at the time, in his Connecticut hotel room after I spoke at a dinner for the Rocky Marciano Foundation in 1991. I spent those hours play-shadowboxing with him while he graciously answered all my questions about boxing techniques and his old-time fights with the members of "Murderers' Row."

I didn't ask him one question about Rocky Marciano, Muhammad Ali, Ezzard Charles or Floyd Patterson. I didn't bring up the usual stuff. He was delighted when I asked him about Curtis "Hatchetman" Sheppard, Lloyd Marshall, Holman Williams, Bert Lytell, Charley Burley and his earlier middleweight battles during the late 1930s and early '40s.

I had him demonstrate different punches for me and I made those two hours count. He was a brilliant, lovable rogue of a man with a great sense of humor. I also conducted interviews with Archie's beloved daughter J'Marie and author Paul Gallender, who is writing a book on Moore.

It is hard to make today's younger boxing fans see the depth of Archie Moore's greatness, because the caliber of the men he beat exists mostly in the memory of older, hardcore boxing fans of yesteryear.

ARCHIE MOORE

- **Born Archibald Lee Wright on December 13, 1913, in Benoit, Mississippi**
- **Died December 9, 1998, in San Diego, age 84**
- **Pro fighter from 1935-1963**
- **Ring record: 186-23-10 (132 KOs)**
- **Titles held: World light heavyweight title, The Ring championship, NBA light heavyweight title, NYSAC light heavyweight title. Reigned for nine years; beat nine world champions and seven hall of famers.**
- **Height: 5-foot-11; Reach: 75 inches**
- **Finally got his title shot in 1952 after 160 pro fights.**
- **Fighting moniker: "The Mongoose"**
- **Managers: Charlie Johnson, Jack "Doc" Kearns. Cornermen: James Norman, Hiawatha Gray, trainer Dick Sadler.**
- **Rated the second-hardest puncher in the last 100 years by The Ring Magazine.**
- **At nearly 42 years old, he punched hard enough to put heavyweight champion Rocky Marciano on the deck with a right hand in the second round of their fight on Sept. 21, 1955.**
- **According to daughter J'Marie Moore and Archie Moore himself, he scored 145 knockouts, which surpasses the 138 KOs by Billy Bird and would make him the all-time record holder. (BoxRec.com lists 132 KOs for Moore.)**
- **Notable wins: Beat Joey Maxim three times; beat Harold Johnson four times, knocking him out in Madison Square Garden in the fifth and final bout of their multi-fight series; beat Jimmy Bivins three times; middleweight champion Carl "Bobo" Olson (KO 3); Holman Williams (TKO 11), and Lloyd Marshall (TKO 10, UD 10). All are in the International Boxing Hall of Fame.**
- **Lightest weight in pro career was 145 pounds against Murray Allen on July 14, 1936; heaviest was 206½ pounds on May 15, 1960, against Willie Besmanoff.**
- **Moore trained in his gym, which he called the "Salt Mine," in Ramona, California. He created a sign that christened his barn the "Bucket of Blood," a name that was later copied by others.**

Strengths: Professional experience against boxing's best, knockout punching power with every punch in the book, exquisite timing, accuracy, ring guile, defense and psychological warfare.

Weaknesses: Waning punch resistance from so many do-or-die battles, fluctuating weight between fights, susceptible to knockdowns.

ARTUR BETERBIEV

In facing Artur Beterbiev, the modern-day undisputed light heavyweight champion, Moore will be up against an iron man of 21st-century training. Beterbiev is also known to have a friendly and humorous personality.

So we have two of the nicest guys outside of the ring but two of the most merciless fighters with no quit in them matched in a championship fight.

In my research on Beterbiev, I exchanged correspondence with his assistant trainer, John "Ice" Scully, a former light heavyweight contender and a longtime friend of mine.

Beterbiev was shaped in the hard, competitive world of Russian amateur boxing and is one of the most dangerous of that breed. His consistent dedication to arduous, spartan training while living a clean lifestyle outside the ring has contributed to him becoming an undefeated champion with 20 knockouts in 21 fights.

- **Born January 21, 1985, in Khasavyurt, Russia; identifies strongly as Chechen; resides in Montreal as a Canadian citizen.**
- **Title held: Undisputed light heavyweight champion (Ring Magazine, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO). First boxer to unify all of the major recognized world 175-pound titles since Roy Jones Jr. in 1999.**
- **Pro career: 2013-present**
- **Pro record: 21-0 (20 KOs)**
- **Height: 5-foot-11½; Reach: 73 inches**
- **Trainer is Marc Ramsay; Andre Kulesza is his strength coach; cutman is Luc-Vincent Ouellet; assistant trainer is Scully.**
- **A devout Muslim who maintains a strict halal diet, which has served him well in training.**
- **Has an intense training regimen and lifestyle, complete with powerlifting combined with lighter weight training. Has never smoked or consumed alcoholic beverages. He is put through every exercise imaginable by Kulesza, including calisthenics and plyometrics.**
- **His boxing workouts, supervised by Ramsay, involve strongly competitive sparring sessions.**
- **Acknowledged by the boxing community as one of the most powerful and disciplined fighters in the business. Superb mental attitude; pushes himself to never miss workouts or roadwork.**
- **Was cut severely by Marcus Browne but showed incredible resolve, seemingly impervious to pain or injury, in rallying to stop Browne in the ninth round.**
- **Holds wins over Dmitry Bivol (MD 12), Callum Johnson (KO 4; Beterbiev was knocked down in Round 2), Callum Smith (TKO 7), Joe Smith Jr. (TKO 2), Anthony Yarde (TKO 8), Oleksandr Gvozdyk (TKO 10).**
- **Amateur record: Estimated at 295-5**
- **Lost on points in the 2008 Beijing Olympics to Xiaoping Zhang.**
- **Won the 2009 World Championships and 2010 European Championship**
- **Fought Oleksandr Usyk three times in the amateurs: Won their first bout by decision in 2007, lost second bout in the 2011 World Championships but knocked Usyk down with a body shot, lost the third at the London Olympics by score of 13-17.**

Strengths: Rocky Marciano-style intense conditioning, powerful constitution, unyielding stamina. A ferociously sharp and accurate puncher; dispenses relentless, aggressive pressure in close or at long range with both hands while using a high-glove defense. Does not telegraph his punches.

Weaknesses: Most experience is in the amateurs. Sometimes careless in close exchanges, leaving himself open for counter shots. Keeps head in "the center line" while on the attack. Can be knocked down, cut or outboxed from the outside during a bout. The possibility of overtraining with heavy weights is unknown at this time.

PRE-FIGHT EVENTS:

At 6 a.m., Archie Moore jogged up Salt Mine Road at the end of a difficult six-mile run.

Arriving at his aptly named Salt Mine Training Camp, he approached the "Bucket of Blood" sign that served notice of what existed beyond his barn door and thought of the reporters who would arrive that afternoon to watch sparring and interview him about the upcoming fight against Artur Beterbiev.

Always the showman, Moore had a lot to say and was eager to meet them. As he cooled down, he went to the computer and watched the highlights of Beterbiev's last 10 knockouts. The Mongoose radiated the vast knowledge of a venerable, old-school boxing sage as he intensely watched each punch, riveted to the screen. It was deliciously akin to a

jungle cat fixing its gaze on its prey.

Moore watched Callum Johnson knock Beterbiev down in the second round with a short counter left hook. His all-knowing eyes glinted dangerously as a brief smile of satisfaction appeared.

He showered and took a breakfast of freshly squeezed orange juice, dry toast and two hard-boiled eggs. The fight was seven weeks away and he was down to 188 pounds, well on the way to come in on time at 175.

He shot a game of pool with his sparring partner, who shook his head in dismay as Archie cleared the table. "Minnesota Fats got nothing on you, Archie." Moore smiled at him and said, "Got to get some rest, gentleman. The table is yours."

He took a nap and was up by 11 a.m. to get ready for the reporters, who would arrive at noon.

When he'd been offered the fight in Saudi Arabia by His Excellency Turki Alalshikh and Beterbiev's team, he was elated. He finally felt he would be paid what he was worth as a lineal light heavyweight champion. The demons of regret still tore at him, reminding him at night about how he only made $800 for the first Joey Maxim title fight when Jack "Doc" Kearns painted him into a corner and made him agree to the $100,000 guarantee that took such a bite out of his purse. He also had to agree to have Kearns co-manage him and agree to a rematch with Maxim in order to get the title shot.

Preparation is relentless and laser-focused in both camps.

Now he would be making $15 million. It would make up for all the short-end money he had to endure while globetrotting to get fights and learn his craft.

His family meant everything to him, and now he could share this great fortune with his daughters and beloved wife, Joan.

The boxing reporters from all the networks, streaming services, magazines and websites arrived. He met them outside with his cornermen in tow. Dick Sadler, Hiawatha Gray and James "Cheerful" Norman stood quietly on the side.

The first question to Archie was, "Who is your manager now, Champ?"

"I am managing myself," Archie replied with no other explanation.

"How do you feel about fighting in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, at Kingdom Arena for the first time?"

"I am very excited and grateful to His Excellency for this great opportunity and for bringing the boxing world to a higher level and showing the world what Muhammad Ali always did, that all men are brothers and for giving everyone who visits a royal welcome and hospitality.

"I also want to thank Team Beterbiev for giving me a shot at all those belts, and I look forward to meeting Artur and shaking his hand."

"What do you know about Artur Beterbiev? Have you seen him fight?"

"I've seen the films of his last 10 fights."

"What do you think about those fights, Archie?"

"Let's say I saw all I need to see! He is tough, skilled and strong, like many men I have fought before. He's a pressure fighter. He is always coming forward punching, forcing his opponents to be on the defense. Strong, tough fighter."

"Archie, are you concerned about his knockout record and his strength training?"

Moore tilts his head to the side and feigns exaggerated disbelief with widened eyes, which elicits a collective smile and ripples of laughter.

He says, "Some guys are built for running through brick walls, some guys for moving refrigerators and some for posing on the beach. And then there is Archie Moore, the Old Mongoose, who is good for knocking …" he almost says "motherfuckers out" but catches himself in mid-stream: "... fighters O.U.T."

Moore adds, "I knocked down Marciano and took all he could throw at me, and this guy is not a Marciano. I knocked out killer punchers Bob Satterfield and Curtis 'Hatchetman' Sheppard, powerful Harold Johnson, the avoided duo of Holman Williams and Lloyd Marshall. I've been there before, gentlemen, and I'll be ready."

"One last question, Archie," says a reporter. "Who are your sparring partners?"

Moore replies, "Matthew Saad Muhammad, Dwight Muhammad Qawi and Michael Spinks." Gray chimes in: "If I may, Archie. Harold Johnson will be coming in next week, too, with another surprise."

"If there are no more questions, that's it for today. I will be leaving for Saudi Arabia two to three weeks before the fight."

Beterbiev: Richard Pelham

Up in Montreal, Artur Beterbiev is in the middle of a punishing workout in Marc Ramsay's Boxing Academy gym under the watchful eyes of his strength coach, Andre Kulesza. He just finished doing sets of deadlifts, power cleans, bench presses and heavy squats, which they are recording to put on YouTube.

Then it was on to pushups – all the way down and up, two hand claps and down again until failure. Afterward, Beterbiev pounded the heavy sledgehammer into a tire and then switched to two drilling hammers, throwing uppercuts with them into the tire until the sweat poured from him.

Next it was the incline abdominal board, working his core, and then throwing a medicine ball into the wall, catching it on the rebound. Then he grabbed a long barbell handle with no weights and twisted it to work his forearms. Finally, he did his jump rope routine and was done for the day. He'd already put in 10 rounds of sparring, heavy bag work and unique speed bag drills that incorporated short, compact punches from the side. His roadwork was done early in the morning.

Now Beterbiev is ready for his interview. He seems impervious to fatigue as the reporters crowd around him and start asking questions.

They are the same questions as always and the same responses from Artur, always a gentleman, never bragging, never making predictions.

"What do you think of Archie Moore?" Artur responds, "A great fighter."

"How do you think you will do in the fight?"

"The best I can."

"Do you see any weaknesses in Moore?"

"We will see on fight night."

"What is your strategy in the fight, Artur?"

"Best to ask my trainers. I will be ready to make a good fight no matter what happens."

"Did you watch Moore's fights on film?"

"Yes, we watch them together as a team. I see he is a great boxer and strong puncher. So am I. So it will be a good fight. Thank you."

Fast-forward to three weeks before the fight in Riyadh. Both fighters are taking an early morning run on the city streets and unexpectedly cross paths toward the end, right near the Mike Tyson Boxing Club. Archie stops and waves a sincere hello to Artur, who waves back. They both stop for a moment. They never got to speak to each other at the press conferences.

Archie greets him as they get closer, saying, "As-salamu alaykum" ("Peace be upon you"). Artur smiles back affectionately at the greeting. Artur gives the traditional response, then says, "It will be an honor to be in the ring with you. We will have a good fight and be friends afterward."

"We definitely will, no matter what happens," Archie says, and adds, "Thanks for giving me a chance at the title."

They shake hands and continue their runs as both training camps' accompanying members smile at the mutual show of respect they have just witnessed.

Archie says to Dick Sadler, who was close by, "I see something special in this guy. I really like him." Sadler responds with, "Yeah, but don't like him too much. We have to fight him."

FIGHT NIGHT

The Kingdom Arena is filled to capacity.

The commentators for the worldwide live stream are Al Bernstein, Randy Gordon and Dave Bontempo.

The big screen hanging over the ring cuts to Moore's dressing room. He is taping his own hands, as always. Ramsay, visiting from Beterbiev's dressing room, is watching closely. Sadler is in Beterbiev's dressing room watching Luc-Vincent Ouellet doing the wraps.

Leaning against the wall in Moore's dressing room are Cheerful and Hiawatha. Looming in the shadows are Big George Foreman and Sandy Saddler. Moore's daughter J'Marie, a pro fighter herself, looks on lovingly with her sister Reena as their dad gets up and starts to shadowbox.

A cheer rises as the crowd sees the dressing room scene – the fight is getting close.

In Beterbiev's dressing room, the taping is done. Artur is shadowboxing while Ice Scully watches approvingly, along with Ramsay, Ouellet and Kulesza. There is a large figure standing in the shadows, but the crowd cannot yet determine who it is.

When the cameras are gone, Muhammad Ali emerges and embraces Beterbiev. He offers a prayer that both fighters will be blessed with good health after the bout.

The ringside rows are adorned with celebrities who have made the trip to see this one-in-a-million battle for all the light heavyweight belts.

Michael Buffer is going through the introductions with his inimitable style. Moore is summoned to the ring; the spotlights are on his entrance. He emerges resplendent in his white robe being led to the ring by Dick Sadler. Behind him is Foreman – whose

appearance brings a roar from the crowd – along with cornermen and Saddler, the great former featherweight champion.

They all jog to the ring. Their energy is electric. Archie climbs through the ropes while Foreman holds them open.

Moore warms up in the corner by throwing beautiful combinations, inspiring cheers of appreciation.

Now Beterbiev is called to the ring. The crowd applauds vigorously, as he is extremely popular in Riyadh. He comes out in his black-hooded robe, led by Ramsay. Behind Artur is Ali. The crowd's reaction is nothing short of complete awe. No one expected this. Beterbiev's cornermen follow with his collection of belts raised for all to see.

Alalshikh is at ringside, smiling. He knew that Ali was Artur's hero and secretly arranged for the people's champ to appear.

Beterbiev is in the ring and gliding around the ring to excited applause.

The spotlight focuses on Buffer.

"The fighters are in the ring and they are ready! To the thousands in attendance, and the millions watching around the world, are you ready!?

"LET'S GET READY TO RUMBLE!

"Fighting out of the blue corner, wearing purple trunks with gold trim, hailing from San Diego, California, weighing 175 pounds even, the former undisputed and longest-reigning light heavyweight champion, The Old Mongoose, Archie Moore!

"Fighting out of the red corner, now hailing from Montreal, Quebec, Canada, wearing the black and silver trunks and weighing in at 174¾ pounds, the undefeated IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO and Ring Magazine light heavyweight champion of the world, the Chechen Warrior, Artur Beterbiev!

"This undisputed championship fight is made possible by His Excellency Turki Alalshikh, with the title belts of the IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO and The Ring Magazine on the line. The judges assigned are Harold Lederman, Steve Weisfeld and John McKaie, and the man in charge of this world title fight is referee Charlie Fitch."

Fitch calls the boxers to the middle of the ring with only their chief seconds. Dick Sadler is rubbing the neck and shoulders of Moore and Marc Ramsay stands with Beterbiev.

"Gentleman, I've given you the rules in the dressing room," says Fitch. "Protect yourselves at all times and obey my commands. Good luck to you both."

They touch gloves and return to their corners, awaiting the opening bell.

ROUND 1

Both fighters carefully circle each other for a few seconds. Artur is using a passive high-glove defense, a ploy to get Moore to lead and commit. Moore does not take the bait and is feinting Beterbiev with his shoulders and head.

Moore snaps out a sharp left jab that drives Artur's gloves into his face, and Beterbiev explodes on him, immediately attacking with both hands, driving Moore onto his back foot. Archie absorbs the two-fisted salvo, catching some punches on his shoulders and gloves, until Beterbiev loops some hard shots around the gloves and lands flush on the side of Moore's head.

The leather exploding on Moore is clearly audible. Moore retaliates with a pinpoint one-two combination that lands in the middle of Beterbiev's face. Beterbiev blazes away with both hands in response, including a hard, fast left hand to the body. Moore is rolling under him in close and switches to his cross-armed defense. There is the bell.

Commentators between rounds:

Al Bernstein: "What a first round. Beterbiev is on the attack but taking some hard punches in return. One thing I notice is that Beterbiev is keeping his head in the center line right in front of Moore while on the attack, leaving himself open for counters."

Randy Gordon: "Bad mistake with a fighter like Archie Moore."

Dave Bontempo: "I score that round 10-9 for Beterbiev, but I wonder if he can keep up that kind of Hearns vs. Hagler pace."

Gordon: "He's done it in all his fights. He never runs out of gas."

10-9 Beterbiev

ROUND 2

Beterbiev is on the attack again with hard, short punches down the middle and around the gloves, stiff uppercuts and short left hooks, none of which are telegraphed but are landing and visibly hurting Moore. He is forcing Moore to fight, and Archie is right in the pocket with him, rolling and countering while taking half steps back and to the side.

During the course of the round, Moore can be heard talking to Beterbiev.

"Good job, son. You're doing great. You got me with that one. I'm getting tired. If you keep this up, I'm in trouble."

Beterbiev maintains his poker face but is listening, and during a small pause, Moore rattles him with a vicious left

It doesn't take long for the fight to heat up.

hook, then slides to the side and cracks a right hand into his left eye. Beterbiev is shaken and angry. He retaliates with everything in his arsenal, but it is not 100% precise and just a tad careless. Moore catches him coming in with stiff jabs and hooks off the jab; all land solidly. Artur instantly retaliates, and they are in a terrific shootout, with Moore getting the best of the exchanges in the middle of the ring.

10-9 Moore

BETWEEN ROUNDS:

The crowd is going wild, cheering both men.

Bernstein: "Beterbiev reminds me of Rocky Marciano in his relentless attack and superb physical condition. Moore better hope this is not shades of Marciano, but I must say Archie is setting traps for him and nailing him good. Both men are trading extremely hard punches, with Moore making the fight even at this point on my scorecard."

In Beterbiev's corner, Ramsay orders his fighter to stay focused and to maintain his form. "Don't listen to him talking to you, he knows every trick in the book. Go to the body more in combination and don't attack in a straight line."

ROUND 3

Beterbiev resumes his attack. Moore times him with jolting jabs, which land and cause noticeable redness around Beterbiev's left eye. Moore is backed into the ropes and takes a pounding. He rolls under some of the punches, but many find the target. Charlie Fitch is watching closely. Moore fights back with a right uppercut and left hook, enabling him to spin out off the ropes. But Beterbiev stays on top of him with nonstop punches, and as Moore trades with him in the center of the ring, Beterbiev lands a crushing right hand from a side angle that drops Moore hard to the canvas.

Beterbiev is pointed to a neutral corner and the alternate referee's voice booms: "One, two, three …" Fitch, on one knee, picks up the count right in front of Moore's face, "… four, five, six, seven, eight." Archie is up and has his gloves wiped off. He tells Fitch he is OK and the fight continues.

Beterbiev is on him like a tiger. He rains punches upon Moore and Archie goes down again. The bell rings, but the count continues. Moore is up at eight again and, unbelievably, walks steadily to his corner.

10-7 Beterbiev

In Moore's corner, Dick Sadler is doing the talking while the cornermen work on Archie. "This is too early to be taking this, champ," Sadler says. "Get some respect from him and let him have some this round. Slow his machine down. Bring me some damn ribs with no sauce, high up on the ribs, and keep working that eye."

Bernstein: "I'm thinking Moore vs. Yvon Durelle right now if he can recover. Artur Beterbiev right now, from what I am seeing, would give any light heavyweight a hard way to go."

ROUND 4

Beterbiev's been told to pour it on, and that is exactly what he is doing. Moore is counterpunching with pinpoint accuracy, and his left-right combinations are hard, accurate shots that catch Artur coming in. But while he's visibly affected by the counters, Beterbiev is still on the attack. With supreme effort, he forces Moore's back against the ropes near his own corner and drops the veteran once again with a short left hook.

Moore is up at the count of five and takes the mandatory eight. Fitch is looking at Archie closely, but he seems OK. The bout is waved on. The crowd is on its feet screaming for Beterbiev when, out of nowhere, Moore drops him with a short, powerful right uppercut and left hook to the temple.

Beterbiev, who dropped his guard while throwing combinations, goes down like he did against Callum Johnson from the same kind of left hook. He rises at the count of four and takes the mandatory eight count.

Instead of boxing and moving, Beterbiev goes right back into battle with Moore, and this time The Mongoose hits him with a flashing right hand between the gloves, directly on the chin, and Artur goes down again. He gets up at the count of six this time and takes the mandatory eight just as the bell rings.

10-8 Moore

Gordon: "Wow! This is beyond belief! What an old-school warrior Moore is."
Bontempo: "Beterbiev must be forged in steel. This is one of the greatest fights I've ever seen."

ROUND 5

The crowd is now in sustained delirium, screaming for both men.

Moore and Artur meet in the ring center with Beterbiev still pressing the action. He rakes Moore with every punch in the book, and Archie is retaliating in kind with vicious body shots that explode high off Beterbiev's right rib cage.

Moore targets Artur's left eye with everything he can throw, and it is now badly cut. They exchange violent combinations in mid-ring with all the power they can muster. Beterbiev drives Moore straight back into the ropes with a frenzied do-or-die attack as crimson rivulets of blood cascade down his face onto his powerful chest.

His face is a mask of desperate fury, and lurking in his combinations is a lethal right hand-left hook that drops Moore to one knee. Artur runs to a white neutral corner before Fitch can send him there.

Moore shakes his head like a wounded bull but gets up at the count of four. Moore signals to Fitch that he is fine during the mandatory eight count, and the referee signals Artur, who comes at Moore like a man possessed. Moore times him with the hardest left-right combination he has ever delivered directly to Beterbiev's jawline, and down he goes.

Beterbiev rises a bit shaky but with the stamina of a terminator. However, his eye is badly cut, extending all the way into the perimeter of his eye socket. Fitch waves the fight back on and Artur is all over Moore, forcing him to defend as they trade thunderous leather at the bell. Archie wobbles Artur again as the bell rings.

10-9 MOORE

In the corner, they are working feverishly on Artur's cut, which is much worse than the one he sustained against Marcus Browne.

The ringside doctor is in the corner while Artur's cutman works to stop the flow of blood. The camera shows the severity of the cut on the big screen, and the crowd lets out a collective "ooooh!" at the sight. The doctor requests Fitch to extend the rest period so he can examine the wound further. The cornermen are pleading for the fight to go on. Beterbiev is having difficulty seeing during the eye exam but argues strongly to continue.

Thirty seconds after the rest period has expired, Beterbiev is still on his stool. The cut is too deep and Artur's vision is too compromised. The doctor signals the referee to stop the fight. The cornermen love Artur and agree to the stoppage, as his vision and health mean more than any championship fight.

Buffer signals to the timekeeper, and the bell is rung numerous times.

"On the decision of the doctor and referee, the fight has been stopped due to the severely cut eye of Artur Beterbiev. The time of the stoppage is 30 seconds into the sixth round. He is the winner by technical knockout… AND THE NEW undisputed light heavyweight champion of the world… 'The Old Mongoose'… Archie Moore!"

Moore and Beterbiev embrace in the middle of the ring as the belts are draped around Archie. "You are a great fighter, Artur, and I will give you a rematch. I promise."

Artur hugs him and thanks Archie for a great fight.

The cornermen congratulate each other on a hard-fought but clean fight as the crowd shows its appreciation for what has truly been an epic clash between two brave warriors at the peak of their powers. The applause is still going as the broadcast team signs off. RING

My First Time

Mikey Garcia

As told to Anson Wainwright

Mikey Garcia didn't just join the family business when he took up boxing – he became the Garcia dynasty's crown jewel. In a pro career that ran from 2006 to 2021, he would hold titles in four weight divisions, from featherweight to junior welterweight, including a Ring championship at 126 pounds. He reached as high as No. 4 on the magazine's pound-for-pound list. The journey had many chapters, though. Here's how three of the big ones began:

First time he put gloves on:

"Growing up in a boxing family, there was always gloves around the house. I do remember one of the very first times I put on a pair of gloves, I was probably 4, 5 years old. We were at the Boys & Girls Club where my brother (former junior lightweight titleholder and three-time Ring Trainer of the Year Robert Garcia) and Fernando [Vargas] and some of the other guys were training. They were still 15, 16 years old. My dad (Eduardo Garcia, who trained Vargas en route to winning two junior middleweight titles) was a coach. I would come to the gym just to fool around. Again, I'm only 5; I can't legally be licensed as an amateur. Fernando Vargas' brother Felix was around my age and would come to the gym to fool around. And one day, my brother, Robert and Fernando put gloves on me and Felix, and they put us in the ring. I didn't want to do it. I was scared. I had never done that. They put us in there, and I remember Felix spinning around with his arms out trying to punch me, and I did the same thing. It became fun, a lot more fun than expected. I said, 'OK, it's not that bad.'"

First amateur fight:

"I was 13 years old. We go to support my nephew, Javier 'Pelos.' He had an amateur competition. We go as a family – my sister, my brother, etc. – to support him. While we're there, my brother asked the coaches about other kids that were gonna fight, and there's one kid, Gilbert – I forget his last name – who didn't have a match. His opponent didn't turn up, and my brother asked the age and weight and looked at me and signed me up. I was not there to fight. I had never done any proper training. I'm 13 years old, but now I'm under pressure. I'm a little embarrassed. If I say I don't want to do this, [my brother and sister would make fun of me]. I didn't have a license; they made it an exhibition. And once I started getting into it, I felt comfortable. It felt natural. And we did three rounds, and the ruling was a draw. That's when I kind of got the itch. It was kind of natural and felt comfortable: 'OK, maybe I'll do this again.' That's when I started to go to the gym and work out, train, practice, and six months later, I had my first official boxing match."

First professional fight:

"Crazy scenario. I was scheduled to be fighting a different day. The fight gets canceled. I get a phone call from my manager, Cameron Dunkin, on Friday morning at 8 a.m.:

"'Hey, do you want to fight tonight?'

"'I've been training, but what do you mean tonight?!' We haven't even weighed in.'

"'Well, I've got you the opportunity to fight tonight if you get to Montebello,' which is an hour and a half from Oxnard. 'They'll weigh you in right now and you get to fight tonight.'

"So, my dad, my brother are like, 'Let's go.' I'm like, 'OK, I guess we're doing this.' It was so quick, so I didn't have time to react. We show up, we weigh in – I think like 129 pounds. My opponent was similar; I forget. (According to BoxRec.com, their weights were 131 and 133, respectively.) Well, while my dad left the ballroom to get me some gauze and some Gatorade, I'm waiting in the ballroom for him to come. It's an hour, then it's two, and my dad didn't come back. I'm like, 'What's going on?' My dad and mom show up and realize someone stole our vehicle with all my gear, my shorts, my shoes, my cup, my mouthguard – everything stolen. So now I have to call the police and file my report, and that took some time. Then I have to go to the Big 5 Sporting Goods store to get me some new shoes. I call Robert, who was at an amateur show out in Indio, California, for Desert Showdown, which is about two hours away. They left to come to my fight, and he brought me some shorts from

Eleven years after his inauspicious pro debut, Garcia outpointed Adrien Broner.

THE PERFECT PUNCH

Mikey Garcia describes one of the most memorable punches of his career:

"There's one fight in particular that comes to mind right away: when I won my WBC lightweight title against Dejan Zlaticanin (January 28, 2017).

"The knockout punch was a right hand, right to the chin of my opponent, but the sequence that led to that punch was something. My brother, my dad and myself, we practiced at the gym throughout the entire training camp. We knew my opponent very well. We studied him. He was a little bit shorter in height than me. We knew his style would be to come forward, be the aggressor. We had a plan to catch him with my right uppercut, sidestep to my left, and whenever he would look at me to [locate] me, that's when I would follow up with an overhand right. And we practiced that sequence daily at the gym.

"When that opportunity presented itself on fight night, I saw that in slow motion. I was able to connect my right uppercut, spin to my left, kind of push him with my left, because he was a southpaw. As I pivoted when he turned around to look for me, the overhand right was already on top of him, and that gave me the knockout victory. But it's crazy how that sequence became a slow-motion moment, because I practiced it so much, and it was perfect. I connected perfectly. He was out before he hit the canvas. Fortunately, he was OK. He was able to recover a few moments after, but that gave me the victory.

"I had other good knockout victories in my career, but that was the only time everything slowed down. That's why you work out so hard – and so many weeks. [That bout was] only the second fight after a long layoff, and I was competing in a third weight class. There were a lot of boxing analysts who doubted I could come back at a third weight class, and [they thought that] after a layoff, maybe I wasn't going to be the same. Anyway, I was able to come back and win with such a clear knockout victory, perfect punch, it just added to the value of that fight. Then winning the WBC lightweight title – a title some of boxing's greatest have held, and my dad had always longed for a WBC championship. He had Fernando [Vargas], and Robert, my brother, world champions, but neither held the WBC title. And I got to do that and bring it home with us – makes that victory that much more special." RING

the amateur team and a cup. Not my cup, but he brought me a protective cup. I bought some Asics wrestling shoes and a $1.99 mouthguard that I had to go boil in the water to fit into my teeth, all a few minutes before I jump in the ring for my pro debut. The fight went well; I win a four-round unanimous decision. It was solid for my pro debut. The guy was a tough guy, Domingo Herrera, and it was a good experience as a fight. I was

"My dad and mom show up and realize someone stole our vehicle with all my gear, my shorts, my shoes, my cup, my mouthguard – everything stolen."

maybe a little nervous. I was a little scared at first. The whole event leading up to that was crazy. When our truck was stolen and I had no gear, I thought maybe we can just postpone this. I made $900 for that fight, and it was mainly to recoup some of my expenses for what I had lost. I had an outfit that I had made that was $1,500 for the shorts and robe. Obviously that was gone, and the $900 didn't even cover my outfit." RING

The Power of the Pen
Steve Weisfeld and Amanda Serrano

Photographs by Wojtek Urbanek • Text by Thomas Hauser

Too often, fights are poorly judged. Clean punching, defense, effective aggression and ring generalship are criteria that leave a lot of room for interpretation. And abuse.

Fighters bleed in the ring and sometimes have their just reward taken from them.

Boxing insiders know who the good judges are. And they know who the bad ones are, too.

Steve Weisfeld is one of the best, with a reputation for integrity and competence.

Weisfeld, who will turn 60 in March, is a practicing attorney who specializes in real estate law. His first judging assignment in the pros came at the Ramada Hotel in New York City on September 20, 1991. One of his fellow judges that night was Harold Lederman. Since then, he has judged close to 3,000 fights, including more than 175 world championship contests.

Weisfeld cast one of the votes in the historic first encounter between Micky Ward and Arturo Gatti (95-93 in Ward's favor). He joined the other judges in delivering a unanimous verdict for Oleksandr Usyk when the Ukrainian seized the heavyweight crown from Anthony Joshua.

His scorecard showed Wladimir Klitschko leading Joshua 95-93 when AJ ended matters with an 11th-round stoppage. And Steve was in a judge's chair when Tyson Fury knocked out Deontay Wilder in their second and third bouts. In each instance, his scorecard (59-52 and 95-92) favored Fury.

Was Weisfeld disappointed that some of those fights didn't go the distance so he could have his say?

"No," Steve answers. "A fight goes to its natural conclusion. And whatever it is, I'm fine with that."

Amanda Serrano can testify to the power of judges. Over the course of 15 years, she has fashioned a 47-3-1 (31 KOs) ring record and won multiple belts in multiple weight classes, including undisputed status at featherweight.

Weisfeld was at ringside for two of Serrano's title fights in 2023 – a 120-108 x 3 drubbing of Danila Ramos and a unanimous decision over Erika Cruz Hernandez to unify all four major 126-pound titles while retaining the Ring Magazine featherweight championship (Steve scored that one 98-92).

© Wojtek Urbanek

But in the two biggest fights of her career, Serrano came up short on the judges' scorecards (which, in the eyes of many, were just plain wrong). On April 30, 2022, she lost a 97-93, 96-93, 94-96 split decision to Katie Taylor at Madison Square Garden. The two women met in the ring again at AT&T Stadium on November 15, 2024. This time, all three judges scored the bout 95-94 in Taylor's favor, prompting blow-by-blow commentator Mauro Ranallo to cry out, "My God! How does one rob Amanda Serrano after a performance like that?"

Boxing needs more judges like Steve Weisfeld. RING

Richard Pelham

Tyson Fury retires … again!

By Tom Gray

“Hi, everybody. I’m going to make this short and sweet: I would like to announce my retirement from boxing.”

So stated Tyson Fury via Instagram on Monday, January 13, 2025, three weeks after his second loss to reigning unified heavyweight champ Oleksandr Usyk.

“It’s been a blast. I’ve loved every single minute of it. And I’m going to end with this … Dick Turpin wore a mask. God bless everybody, see you on the other side. Get up!”

First things first, Dick Turpin was an 18th-century English criminal notorious for robbing people at gunpoint while wearing a mask. The most popular theory among boxing insiders is that Fury mentioned Turpin because he believes he was robbed in both of his decision losses to Usyk.

The Turpin stuff is new, but the retirement announcement has been part of The Gypsy King’s vernacular for almost a decade, so you can forgive us for being just a little skeptical of his sincerity.

Following Fury’s epic points triumph over long-reigning champion Wladimir Klitschko in November 2015, the Manchester man struggled badly with his mental health. He would also fail a VADA test, which turned up a compound found in cocaine, that subsequently nixed an October 2016 rematch with Klitschko.

“Boxing is the saddest thing I ever took part in, all a pile of shit, I’m the greatest, & I’m also retired,” said Fury via Twitter (now X) in response.

A few hours later, with his “retirement” now viral, Fury retracted the announcement.

“Hahahaha u think you will get rid of the GYPSYKING that easy!!! I’m here to stay. #TheGreatest just shows u what the Medea [sic] are like. Tut tut.”

And so began Fury’s love affair with hanging up the gloves. He would battle with his weight, which peaked at almost 400 pounds, and slug it out with UKAD over the revelation that he’d failed another drug test (nandrolone) following a stoppage win over German fighter Christian Hammer in February 2015. Fury, who denied any wrongdoing, ultimately served a backdated suspension and returned to action in June 2018.

A hard-hitting trilogy with American knockout artist Deontay Wilder made Fury a two-time heavyweight champion and a global superstar. He also became an advocate for mental health, and his fame and following grew and grew. The Covid pandemic dulled his ring momentum, but a super-hyped showdown with Dillian Whyte saw 94,000 fans fill Wembley Stadium in April 2022.

Looking on from ringside, I watched Fury remove Whyte from his senses with a spectacular right uppercut in Round 6. In excellent form and having rubber-stamped his status as the No. 1 heavyweight on the planet, it therefore came as a surprise when the champ announced his retirement … again.

“Is that final?” I asked Fury at the post-fight press conference.

“I definitely think so,” he said.

Understandably, there were one or two groans in the media room at that response. Not for the first time, Fury, as shrewd a man as one could ever meet in boxing, was playing games.

However, in August 2022, less than two weeks out from the Oleksandr Usyk-Anthony Joshua rematch, Fury informed the WBC that he would be giving up his title. At that time, he was also the Ring champion, so I was quickly assigned the task of finding out if The Gypsy King was willing to abdicate that throne.

“Yes, but The Ring Magazine championship has always been the holy grail of boxing,” Fury told me during a telephone call one Saturday afternoon. “They’ve always been fantastic with me and I’ve always carried that title with pride.

“I’ve done well out of boxing. The world is open to so many things now. I’m doing a Netflix documentary at the moment. I’m going to be recording an album soon. Who knows, you might see me on the silver screen.”

Of course, when Usyk repeated his points triumph over “AJ” to add the vacant Ring championship to his growing collection, Fury put Hollywood on the back burner and vowed a fistic takeover. He’d been granted a short window of time by the WBC in case he changed his mind about relinquishing its title, and he now elected to keep it.

“I got bored with retirement,” Fury told me when I called him for the second time in two weeks. “I had five months out the ring and I changed my mind. Nobody believed me anyway, did they? I would still have passed a lie detector test, though, for sure.

“I vacated the Ring title and I’ll now become a three-time Ring champion.”

Again, shrewd! Fury wanted to match Muhammad Ali’s accomplishment of being the only other three-time Ring Magazine heavyweight champion. Following a routine stoppage win over old foe Derek Chisora and an embarrassingly close points victory over boxing neophyte Francis Ngannou, Fury got his chance to become undisputed king.

Unfortunately, the great Usyk had other ideas and claimed two decision victories over his nemesis in 2024.

Regardless of whether Fury sticks to his retirement guns this time or comes back for a money-spinning U.K. shootout with Joshua, he’s been a great fighter, and his accomplishments have been stellar. The Gypsy King will swagger into the Hall of Fame in Canastota the first time he appears on the ballot, and rightly so.

With all that said, if he’s returned to the sport by the time this article is published, I wouldn’t be the least bit surprised.

Who would? RING

Billy Dib

By Anson Wainwright

Opponent: Steven Luevano
October 18, 2008,
Boardwalk Hall, Atlantic City
Title: WBO featherweight

Note: This story contains references to a drug called clenbuterol, which is currently classified as a banned substance by anti-doping organizations. "I didn't realize what I was taking and was reckless," said Dib. "I want fighters to know that you need to be responsible for what you put in your body, because it could have cost me my career. But more importantly, I could have lost my life."

Billy Dib had been a professional for four years and had remained unbeaten through 21 fights when he got his first world title shot. It happened on HBO Pay-Per-View, no less.

"I was given like six weeks' notice for the fight," Dib told The Ring. "I'd made featherweight twice since I was an amateur. I was the current IBO junior lightweight champion and I'd be moving down to featherweight to fight Steven Luevano [even though] I hadn't made that weight in such a long time. But my brother, Imad, had discussed with Golden Boy Promotions and they really wanted to do the fight, and it would be on the undercard of Kelly Pavlik-Bernard Hopkins as the main support."

The 23-year-old Australian decided the opportunity and career-high payday were too good to pass up. However, things quickly took an unexpected twist.

"Literally five weeks out from the fight, my brother rang me and said, 'The fight's off.' He's like, 'Go get some pizza. We'll work it out – no problem. Go enjoy yourself for a while,'" said Dib. "I'm in Australia at that time. I break from camp, I go out, eat some pizza, I get food and drinks and chocolates and have a good night out with my cousins.

"The next day, I must have put on three kilos, nearly six pounds, and my brother rang me and goes, 'I've got some bad news.' I said, 'What is it?' He said, 'The fight's back on.' I go, 'Are you joking!?! I've just put on stacks of weight.' I was 10 kilos overweight, close to 23 pounds over the weight. He said, 'If you don't take the fight, Golden Boy are going to tear your contract up.' I was sort of forced into the fight with Steve Luevano."

That left Dib in a very difficult position.

Ultimately, he did something that he wouldn't have gotten away with today.

"A friend of mine rings me up and says, 'What are you going to do about making weight?' I was like, 'I don't know.' He said, 'I can help you.' I said, 'What have you got?' He said, 'I can give you some clenbuterol.' I said, 'What is that?' He said, 'Something they give horses to lose weight.' I was like, 'I'll do whatever I have to do.' I was five weeks out. My friend comes to the gym and gives me clenbuterol, and I trained like a man possessed that day.

"Once the high was over and I was crashing – it was a diuretic drug – I started to hallucinate, see and hear things, and the next thing you know I started throwing up. I couldn't stop myself from throwing up. I ended up at the doctor's, and the doctor gave me a needle to bring me back to life. I was on the brink of death."

That harrowing experience played a significant part in him making weight, but it came at a cost.

"When I eventually got on the scale the following day, I had lost close to six kilos, something like 15 pounds, in six hours from vomiting and everything," he explained. "I never really recovered. I was extremely sick throughout the prep. It wasn't about preparing for the fight; it was just about making weight. We never put a game plan together."

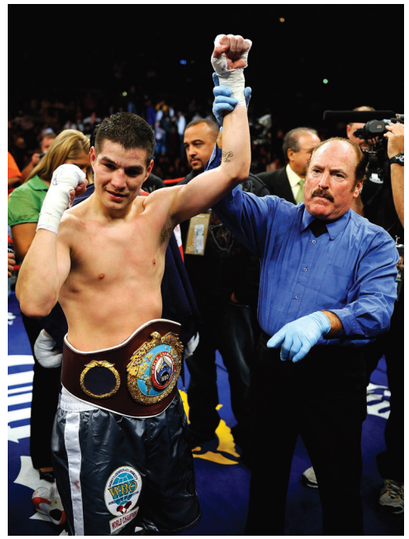
Just seven days before the fight, Dib and his team – including head trainer Harry Hammond, legendary Australian coach Johnny Lewis and cutman Brian Wilmot – flew from Sydney to Los Angeles into Atlantic City, which is 16 hours behind Dib's homeland.

"I was flying economy; I wasn't flying business class," he said. "It's like when it's morning in Atlantic City, it's nighttime in Australia. I was extremely jet lagged, but that's something you have to overcome as a challenger. That's what makes it so much sweeter when you win on the road.

"As a professional, you need to make the right decisions. For me, I should have traveled a lot earlier. I should have taken it a lot more serious. But the truth is, I didn't want to be there."

Things didn't improve at the weigh-in the day before the fight.

"I remember getting on the scale and I had to make weight, which was 126 pounds," said Dib. "And then Steven Luevano got on the scale, and he was like 126-something. And I was like, 'No, the weight limit is 126.' And everyone around me is like, 'No, if he takes his underwear off, he'll make the weight.' And I was like, 'Well, take them off.' He didn't end up taking them off, and I sort of felt a little hard done by at the time – he got away with it."



Luevano retained his 126-pound title.

Dib remembers that Luevano's trainer, Robert Garcia, then disrupted his flow just prior to the fight.

"He would come into the changing rooms and go, 'Nah, take your gloves off. Wrap your hands again. I want to see you wrap. I didn't get to see you wrap,'" said Dib. "Robert Garcia is a very smart man. He knew how to get into your head to upset you. He did what he had to do for the benefit of his fighter. He wasn't at the time the superstar trainer, like he is today. Steven was his first world champion, and Robert was a former world champion, and he knew his way around the boxing ring."

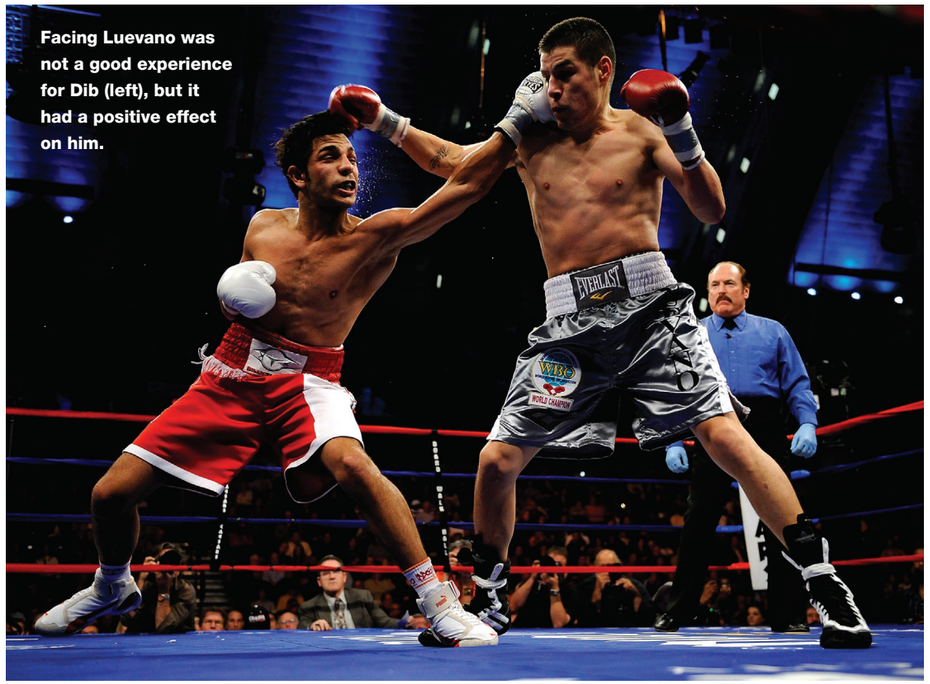
The fight played out as a rather tame, tepid affair in which the defending titleholder recorded a 12-round unanimous decision.

"We got in the ring and it was a tactical, boring battle. There wasn't a lot of action," said Dib. "He won a lackluster decision that he deserved. I didn't push to win the fight. I was very disheartened about the way things were in the lead-up to the fight. I was disheartened with Golden Boy pushing me into that situation. I was disheartened with the way I made weight. I was disheartened by the way he made weight. I was a little bit bitter with boxing at that time."

The defeat galvanized Dib's commitment, however, and it proved to be the catalyst that kick-started his career.

"What I can say is that loss was the transformation in my life. It was when I decided to actually take the sport of boxing seriously and start to really bite down and work extremely hard," he said. "I left no stone unturned to make sure I became a world champion. That's when I went on a winning streak of 10 fights before I won the IBF world title." RING

Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on X @AnsonWainwright.



Facing Luevano was not a good experience for Dib (left), but it had a positive effect on him.

Jeff Zelevansky

THAILAND

BY WASIM MATHER

Home crowd, home disbelief

Thailand has always fascinated me. It's more than the land of temples and bustling street food markets – it's a country that breathes combat sports. Having spent over a decade immersed in its boxing culture, I've seen how Muay Thai dominates the narrative. But to overlook Thailand's boxing pedigree would be a mistake. This small nation has produced 53 world titleholders.

Yet, in recent years, boxing in Thailand has struggled to reclaim its golden era. With just three major promoters carrying the torch, opportunities for Thai fighters to shine on the world stage have dwindled. Last year, however, offered a glimmer of hope. Five Thai fighters challenged for world titles, but only one – Panya Pradabsri, or Petchmanee CP Freshmart (44-2, 27 KOs) – came out victorious.

Pradabsri's story is one of dedication and resilience. The former WBC 105-pound champion lost his title to Japan's Yudai Shigeoka in 2023. After that setback, he moved up to the 108-pound division in search of redemption. His opportunity came when Kenshiro Teraji vacated the WBC junior flyweight title. Standing in Pradabsri's way was Carlos Canizales, a seasoned Venezuelan who had challenged Teraji for the same belt earlier in 2024 but lost a close majority decision, making him even more determined this time.

When Pradabsri's trainer, Chatchai Sasakul – a former flyweight champion I've worked with closely over the years – shared the news of the bout, I felt the seriousness of the moment. This wasn't just about another world title fight. The setting – Rajadamnern Stadium – made

Even loyal fans in Bangkok believed Venezuelan veteran Carlos Canizales (right) did enough to outpoint Panya Pradabsri.

SOPA Images

it historic. It had been 17 years since a boxing world title bout graced this iconic venue.

For those unfamiliar, Rajadamnern Stadium is a distinguished venue for combat sports. Its natural, rugged charm feels like stepping back in time. The atmosphere is gripping, with fans – many of them Muay Thai gamblers – creating a symphony of cheers and animated gestures as they track the shifting odds. It's a scene like no other, a Colosseum for modern gladiators.

I couldn't help but wonder what was going through Canizales' mind as he walked into this arena. Far from home, surrounded by passionate Thai fans rooting for their local hero, he carried himself with the calm of a seasoned warrior. For the Venezuelan, this wasn't unfamiliar territory – he had walked this path before, stepping into opponents' backyards and thriving in hostile environments.

On the day of the fight, the atmosphere was buzzing with anticipation. I arrived at the stadium early and was whisked away to the back with Chatchai, who asked me to supervise the hand-wrapping of Canizales. It was a surreal moment, a reminder of my early days in Thailand when I served as an assistant trainer under Chatchai. Back then, I learned to navigate the nuances of training fighters and the intricate politics of the fight game.

The fight itself was a testament to the courage of both men. From the opening bell, Canizales came out aggressively, targeting Pradabsri's body and head with precision. The Thai champion, true to form, began cautiously, circling and countering when openings appeared.

By the middle rounds, a pattern emerged: The Venezuelan pressed the action while Pradabsri relied on sharp, single counters. As the rounds wore on, it became evident that Canizales was in control. His combinations were crisper, his punches heavier. Pradabsri, showing signs of fatigue, was forced to retreat and rely on survival tactics.

By the 11th round, the visitor was relentless, pinning Pradabsri to the ropes and unleashing a barrage of punches. The Venezuelan seemed on the verge of a stoppage, but Pradabsri held on, clinching and throwing just enough to avoid the referee's intervention.

When the final bell rang, I was certain of the outcome. Canizales had done enough – or so it seemed.

As the ring announcer read the scorecards, the crowd grew tense. "Judge Malcom Bulner scored it 114-114, a draw. Judge Zanashir Taznaa had it 116-112 for Pradabsri. And Judge Antonio Carrillo scored it 115-113 for Pradabsri."

The verdict sent shockwaves through the arena, and disbelief quickly turned to outrage. Even Pradabsri's home supporters, known for their unwavering passion, booed the decision. When the hometown crowd is booing their own fighter, you know something went wrong.

It was baffling to hear that Judge Antonio Carrillo had given the 11th round – a round where Canizales clearly dominated – to Pradabsri. The Venezuelan's team erupted in protest, blocking TV crews in their frustration as the new champion was crowned. In my eyes, Canizales had done enough and should have left Thailand that night with the belt.

Professional boxing in Thailand is at a crossroads. Nights like this risk undermining the sport's integrity, particularly on such a historic stage as Rajadamnern. While rumors of a rematch swirl, the question remains: Can professional boxing in Thailand reclaim its credibility in the eyes of the world?

As I left the stadium, the weight of the night stayed with me. Rajadamnern Stadium had delivered a spectacle, but it also reignited an all-too-familiar debate about judging in the sport. The decision overshadowed what should have been a celebration of the sweet science. Thailand has a new world champion – but at what cost? The controversy surrounding the scorecards has left a lingering question about fairness, casting a shadow over the night and raising doubts about the credibility of the sport in the region. For all its triumphs and controversies, the night was unforgettable – a chapter etched into Thailand's rich, yet complicated, boxing history.

★ ★ ★

AUSTRALIA

BY ANTHONY COCKS

Jai Opetaia delivers brutal KO in homecoming fight

Ring Magazine and IBF cruiserweight champion Jai Opetaia has cleared the path to a May unification bout with WBA/WBO counterpart Gilberto "Zurdo" Ramirez after brutally icing David Nyika in four rounds at the Gold Coast Convention Centre in Broadbeach, Queensland, on January 8.

New Zealand's Nyika, who took the bout on three weeks' notice after original opponent Huseyin Cinkara of Germany suffered an ankle injury, came out firing at the opening bell. In the second round, he craftily switched to southpaw in a clinch, created some space and then nailed Opetaia with a left cross high on the head that buzzed the champion.

It was his best moment of the fight. It was also the worst thing he could've done.

Opetaia's manager, Mick Francis of Tasman Fighters, warned Nyika in the week leading up to the fight about the perils of antagonizing his fighter.

"If he is going to get under Jai's skin, which he is starting to, the fight might not last long. When you poke the bear, the bear bites," Francis told news agency AAP.

Chris Hyde

Opetaia (right) was tagged early by Nyika but soon overwhelmed the brave prospect.

"I know what Jai is like. Jai is happy to box if he wants to box. If he wants to bang and bring it, then Jai will bang. Jai will find a chink in his armor."

The shot that Nyika landed to Opetaia's dome simply served to wake up the 29-year-old Queensland-based southpaw. Opetaia came out in the third round and showed no mercy for his former sparring partner, picking up the pace and going through the gears.

In the fourth, he nailed Nyika with a right uppercut to the jaw, sinking the challenger to the canvas. Although Nyika was quickly back on his feet, the writing was on the wall.

Moments later, Opetaia landed a three-punch combination to the head that sent Nyika reeling to the ropes. With the challenger out on his feet and referee David Fields not prepared to intervene, Opetaia drilled home one final left hand that spun Nyika around 180 degrees and saw him pitch face-first to the canvas, out cold.

Nyika remained unconscious on the canvas for some time as medical staff attended to him. Eventually, he was able to leave the ring under his own steam.

Opetaia wasted little time in his post-fight interview letting the live crowd and viewers at home know who he wanted next.

"Ramirez, I'm coming for the belts. We're coming for the rest of the belts, man. We're coming for them," said Opetaia, who was having his first fight in Australia since defeating Mairis Briedis in their initial encounter at the same venue two and a half years ago. "I've been chasing a unification fight for a long time. I'm coming for my belts."

In two showcase fights on the undercard, heavyweights Justis Huni and Teremoana Teremoana both scored early knockouts.

Opetaia's belt collection currently includes the Ring and IBF cruiserweight titles. He wants more.

Brisbane's Huni, 25, dispatched South Africa's Shaun Potgieter with a flurry of blows early in the second round of his 12th pro bout. Olympian Teremoana, 26, also of Brisbane, barely got his motor started before flattening Germany's Osasu Otobo with a left hook in the opening frame.

Next up for Huni is a trip to the hospital for surgery to remove two bone chips from his left elbow before a possible bout against unbeaten Brit Johnny "The Romford Bull" Fisher later this year.

Teremoana, who is now 6-0 with six knockouts, is expected to box as frequently as possible in 2025 as he looks to build his pro experience.

Jason Moloney lands high-profile bout in Japan

Road warrior Jason Moloney is set to return to Japan when he takes on former K1 star Tenshin Nasukawa in a 10-rounder at Ariake Arena in Tokyo on February 24.

The card is headlined by The Ring's No. 1-rated bantamweight Junto Nakatani defending his WBC strap against David Cuellar, and it will also feature Seiya Tsutsumi making the maiden defense of his WBA 118-pound belt against ex-WBC flyweight titleholder Daigo Higa.

Moloney lost his WBO bantamweight title to Yoshiki Takei at the Tokyo Dome in May in what was his second defense of the belt. Undeterred, the 34-year-old headed back to Japan for a monthlong training camp to help Tsutsumi prepare for his title fight against Takuma Inoue in October.

After watching his friend defeat Inoue by decision, Moloney got a close-up look at Nasukawa the following night, when the 26-year-old southpaw outpointed Gerwin Asilo over 10 heats in his fifth pro bout.

"Tenshin is incredibly popular over here. He's more popular than Nakatani and gets more attention," Moloney told The Ring at the time.

"There are whispers that they will try to present him as a possible opponent for me. Obviously I'd prefer a title fight, but he's a big name over here, so that's another name we would consider. We'll wait and see."

Moloney is ranked No. 7 by The Ring at 118 pounds.

Irish-Australian TJ Doheny to face Nick Ball

Adopted Aussie TJ Doheny will travel to Liverpool, England, to challenge WBA featherweight titleholder Nick Ball at Echo Arena on March 15.

At 38, the Irish southpaw has enjoyed a late-career resurgence over the past two years, culminating in a shot at undisputed junior featherweight champion Naoya Inoue last September in Tokyo.

Doheny lost that fight, retiring from the contest early in the seventh round after suffering a back injury. But his performance was sufficiently competitive to earn him another payday at a higher weight against The Ring's No. 3-ranked 126-pounder. Ball is coming off a stellar year that saw him log wins over Ronny Rios and Raymond Ford as well as a hotly disputed split draw against Rey Vargas.

George Kambosos Jr. returns in March

Former Ring Magazine lightweight champion George Kambosos Jr. is expected to make his Matchroom and 140-pound debut in Sydney, New South Wales, on March 22. As we go to print, no opponent has been announced.

It will mark the 31-year-old's first fight in his hometown in almost eight years. Kambosos has not boxed since his 11th-round knockout loss to Vasiliy Lomachenko in Perth, Western Australia, last May.

Matchroom had planned to pair Kambosos up with fellow Australian Liam Paro, except the 28-year-old Queensland southpaw surrendered his IBF title on points to Richardson Hitchins in San Juan, Puerto Rico, in December.

Brooklyn's Hitchins, 27, is now the target for Kambosos later this year, providing he gets through his March date unscathed.

★ ★ ★

ARGENTINA

BY DIEGO MORILLA

It was expected to be on everyone's short list for the 2024 Fight of the Year, but the Fernando Martinez-Kazuto Ioka rematch scheduled for December 31 in Japan had to be canceled at the last minute. Apparently, Martinez was affected by very serious flu symptoms that started to manifest upon his arrival in Japan and never subsided.

Their extraordinary unification clash last July was already considered one of the best fights of 2024, and a few of us (guilty, here) were refusing to vote for the Fight of the Year award until the final bell of their rematch, which was supposed to be the main event in Japan's traditional end-of-the-year boxing mega-event. But a virus got in the way, and after careful consideration from Martinez's team, the fight was called off only hours before it was supposed to take place.

Hints were dropped when Martinez was kept from participating in the open training session scheduled a few days before the fight due to a high fever. Martinez explained then that "we're coming from a tropical climate in Florida … and landing in Japan with such cold weather has affected me. I only have a fever, but I am sure I will be able to fight."

It was only in the hours leading up to the weigh-in that trainer Rodrigo Calabrese came clean and disclosed the seriousness of the situation. "We regret to inform you that Fernando tested

Fernando Martinez takes a right cross en route to outpointing Japanese legend Kazuto Ioka last July.

positive for influenza type A. We will return soon, and stronger than ever."

A rematch date is in the works. Whenever that clash takes place, it will not have the IBF belt at stake, since Martinez vacated it in order to focus only on defending the WBA title he lifted from Ioka in the first encounter.

A fighter who did return successfully to the ring in December was former Ring middleweight champion Sergio Martinez. The caveat, however, is that he faced former soccer goalkeeper Pablo Migliore in an exhibition bout that nevertheless managed to sell out the very same Velez Sarsfield soccer stadium in which Martinez defended his belt against Martin Murray almost 12 years ago (in what was my first-ever coverage for The Ring, incidentally). The undercard was filled with fights pitting influencers and media characters turning their public airings of grievances into feats of strength in front of a raucous audience of Gen Zs and young millennials sitting through a boxing card for the first time in their lives, including my son Francisco (talk about an apple that fell far from the tree). The clash itself saw Martinez showing flashes of his former self against a taller and heavier foe who learned to fight during a brief jail stint. Their underlying soccer rivalry (Migliore played for the popular Boca Juniors team, while Martinez passionately follows their nemesis, River Plate, having even tried out to be a player there before his boxing career started) provided the bad blood background that the fight needed to attract casual fans from both teams and beyond.

In the most relevant clash of the final days of 2024, blue-chip flyweight contender Tobias Reyes traveled to Nicaragua, only to lose his unbeaten status against Felix Alvarado in an extremely close fight. The two 115-113 cards and the single 114-114 score that Reyes was able to obtain in that notoriously hostile territory (the same city in which Miguel Castellini had a military police officer climb to the ring between rounds and tell him at gunpoint to lose his fight against fellow officer/contender Eddie Gazo in 1977, for example) tell the whole story.

Even though he was nine years his foe's senior, Alvarado did show an impressive array of weapons that he deployed throughout the contest with great versatility. Reyes' power and accuracy were on display during the entire fight, but the 27-year-old was never able to capitalize on his strengths, since Alvarado managed to reply with a solid volume of punches and a lot of mobility, never allowing himself to be in front of Reyes for too long. With the loss, Reyes is now 0-1-1 in fights abroad, but his age and talent level suggest that he will be turning those numbers around very soon.

A fighter who was able to turn his luck around was Fabian "TNT" Maidana, estranged brother of former world titlist Marcos Maidana, by bouncing back from his decision loss to Mario Barrios back in May 2024 with two straight stoppage wins. The most recent came at the expense of Jesus Antonio Rubio in Santa Fe, with Maidana sending his Mexican foe to the canvas in the opening round and stopping him in the seventh when Referee Analia Maradona (nephew of soccer legend Diego Maradona) stepped in and called a halt to the bout.

★ ★ ★

SOUTH AFRICA

BY DROEKS MALAN

The new year did not start well for South African boxing. National heavyweight champion Shaun Potgieter was outclassed and stopped in two rounds by undefeated Australian Justis Huni in Queensland, Australia.

The difference in speed was obvious from the first bell. Potgieter landed a glancing right and a left hook through the course of the round, but Huni stepped back from his attacks and let his hands go at will. Potgieter rolled under some of the punches, but he ate right hands and shipped left hooks to the body.

One of those left hooks strayed low, which led to the referee stopping the action momentarily.

When the fight resumed, Huni continued to back his opponent to the ropes. Potgieter fought back in spurts, just enough to avoid the stoppage.

In the second, Potgieter let his hands go but struggled to reach Huni, who was just a step ahead. A right from Huni around the guard followed by a left hook to the body buckled Potgieter, backing him into the corner. Huni let rip with a combination to the head and body, prompting the referee to jump in at the 0:33 mark.

It was always going to be a big ask. Potgieter tried but fell short on the international stage. There are some good local matchups waiting for him.

Who will be South Africa's next titleholder among the four recognized sanctioning bodies?

Presently it has one major beltholder in Phumelele Cafu, who upset Kosei Tanaka to become WBO junior bantamweight champion last year.

Besides Cafu, there is another junior bantamweight, Ricardo Malajika, flyweight Jackson Chauke, welterweight Thulani Mbenge and junior flyweight Mpumelelo Tshabalala, who all hold IBO belts not recognized by The Ring. Kevin Lerena holds the WBC title at bridgerweight, a cruiserweight/heavyweight middle-ground division also not recognized by The Ring.

Bantamweight Landi Ngxeke is on a six-fight win streak over decent opposition. Junior middleweight

South African heavyweight Shaun Potgieter (right) lasted only two rounds with Australian prospect Justis Huni.

Shervantaigh Koopman has run his record to 15-0 against progressively tougher opponents. Then there is strawweight contender Siyakholwa Kuse, who had a breakout year.

Despite his crushing defeat at the hands of Masamichi Yabuki last October, one can also not write off former two-time IBF junior flyweight titleholder Sivenathi Nontshinga, who is plotting a comeback, probably at flyweight.

It is, however, not just a question of talent. The right promotional connections and having a beatable champion in front of you at the right time also play a role.

Lerena is in that uncomfortable neverland of being unable to make cruiserweight and at a physical disadvantage at heavyweight. Still, he gave very respectable losing efforts against both Daniel Dubois and Huni. Another big fight against a well-known name in the glamor division seems very plausible, but a heavyweight world title is hard to envision.

With the departure of Terence Crawford and Errol Spence, the welterweight division is more open than it used to be. Will that work in Mbenge's favor? It could, but he will have to keep winning, and his lack of an established promoter might hinder his ability to secure a title shot.

Koopman has thus far shown solid boxing skills and calm under fire, but the 154-pound division harbors serious talent in the top 10. He is still more than a year away from mixing it up with the likes of Israil Madrimov, Bakhram Murtazaliev and Sebastian Fundora, nevermind Crawford.

Tshabalala was underwhelming in his last win. He had to get off the canvas to eke out a split decision over Junior Leandro Zarate, and one must wonder whether he has reached his ceiling.

Still, it is in the lower weight divisions where South Africa's best hopes lie.

Ngxeke is well-positioned in some of the sanctioning bodies' rankings at 118 pounds. His promoter, Xaba Boxing Promotions, in the past has gotten its charges close to challenging for world belts, only to stumble in eliminators. Ngxeke's offensive form has been good as of late, but there remains a question mark over his chin. Hopefully he will get a chance in 2025 to roll the dice.

Malajika will be facing Jackson Chauke in a local derby at flyweight in March. If he is successful, he is likely to return to junior bantamweight, where there might be an opportunity, with the IBF belt having just been declared vacant. Whoever wins that is likely to be a smaller mountain to climb than anyone named "Bam."

Your best bet is probably in boxing's smallest division. Kuse scored a stirring 12-round decision over previously unbeaten Beaven Sibanda to end 2024. That win got him a spot in The Ring's strawweight ratings and the WBC's "silver" belt, a piece of alphabet hardware that often leads to a title shot. There is already talk of him meeting the champion, Melvin Jerusalem, should the Filipino prevail in his rematch against Yudai Shigeoka in March.

JAPAN

BY YURIKO MIYATA

RIP, Holy Mother of Japanese Boxing

Miss Haru Nagano, manager of the legendary Teiken Gym, quietly said goodbye to this world on the first day of 2025. The solemn news was made public five days later, which might have been her own wish so as not to hurt people's New Year's holiday, the most traditional three-day celebration in Japanese culture. She would have celebrated her 100th birthday on April 26.

Needless to say, Miss Nagano (I hesitate to present her name without courtesy) had been the oldest working person in boxing and was a witness to the entire history of modern Japanese boxing. She was licensed as a manager by the Japan Boxing Commission in 1952, the year the national commission was established to work for the country's first world title boxing event – flyweight Yoshio Shirai's defeat of popular Hawaiian Dado Marino to become the first Japanese world champion.

It's still hard to believe she won't be there anymore when I visit the Teiken Gym in Tokyo, where she always stood, vigilant, looking about the busy floor, taking care of the boxers, sometimes giving advice: "Use your hip to punch harder!" Otherwise, she was busy doing administrative chores in the small office where she could see everyone through the window. Despite her diminutive, fragile-looking stature, she commanded respect, casting an authoritative but caring presence throughout the gym, especially with the younger boxers, even into her 90s.

She was missing from the gym when I visited there last July. I heard that she had undergone surgery on a leg fracture and was recovering at her niece's home, but I thought she might be fine and back in the gym, as she always had before whenever she had fallen ill. To know Miss Nagano was to understand her resilience. Most of us in the Japanese boxing community thought she would just keep going.

On November 30, Masashi Sugibayashi, president of Winning boxing equipment, talked to her directly over the phone. "Miss Nagano called me to order a couple of pairs of gloves, just like always. I never thought that it would be the last time I'd speak with her. Even now, I feel as if she might call me at any moment," said Sugibayashi, one of her closest friends.

Miss Nagano had been the backbone of one of the nation's oldest and most powerful boxing stables, Teiken Boxing, but she wanted to stay behind the scenes. Soon after I joined the editorial staff of Boxing Magazine 30 years ago, I started a serialized column featuring the unsung women who help support the dreams of boxers. I interviewed and wrote about the wives and mothers of boxers, often in the background, as well as the rare female managers who help boxers and promoters in every way. But the chief editor stopped me from interviewing Miss Nagano, as he had been aware that she never loved the spotlight or publicity. That was kind of an unspoken agreement in the industry, even though we recognized her as an unsung hall-of-famer.

It had been more than 76 years since she began working for Teiken in 1948. At the age of 23, she started as a secretary for former president Akira Honda, who was one of the key figures in the beginning of Japanese boxing. After Akira passed away at age 64 in 1965, he was succeeded by his son Akihiko, who was still a teenager. While it is said that Miss Nagano joined Teiken without knowing it's a boxing promotion company, she learned the sport and business and became a sturdy foundation for the growing stable, supporting the young Honda's rise to prominence in the old-style Japanese society.

She developed enough technical insight to help instruct and support Masao Oba, a skinny but ambitious 16-year-old boy when they first met, all the way to becoming Teiken's first world champion with a 13th-round knockout of WBA flyweight titleholder Berkrerk Chartvanchai in Tokyo in October 1970.

She was always ringside, praying for the boxers' triumph and safety. She suffered unimaginable sorrow when Oba was killed in a severe car crash just three weeks after he made a dramatic fifth defense of his flyweight title, getting up from an opening-round knockdown and surviving a leg injury to score a 12th-round stoppage of Thai challenger Chartchai Chionoi in January 1973. And also when strawweight standout Masatate Tsuji passed from a brain injury in his first attempt to win a vacant national title in March 2009. Miss Nagano held that grief deep inside of her but was always there for boxers and lived long enough to witness the birth of Teiken's 14th major world titleholder, the largest number from one stable in Japan, when Shokichi Iwata stopped Jairo Noriega in the third round last October.

Miss Haru Nagano with WBC President Mauricio Sulaiman.

Miss Nagano was not easy on newcomers to boxing, especially those who tried to get into the business without respecting the sport. It did not take much time for me to figure out that the sole reason for her dedication to boxing was pure love and honor toward the young fighters who chose the toughest sport and pursue glory with a lot of sacrifice. Her only hope was for their happiness and their health, which is why she commanded strict discipline in the gym. She wanted them to give up alcohol during their boxing career. When she happened to spot a beer glass in the corner of an obscure photo published in Boxing Magazine, she called the editorial room to ask us to be more careful about it, saying "It's not good for boxers." Boxers appreciated her concern.

When Kenichi Ogawa won the vacant IBF 130-pound title by beating Azinga Fuzile in New York in November 2021, he showed me a custom-made rubber stamp: "IBF super featherweight champion Kenichi Ogawa."

"I made this as part of my determination to win today," he said. "I wish I could stamp this on your notebook here, but I promised myself to give the first autograph with this stamp to my manager, Miss Nagano."

Many Teiken alumni would stop by the old gym to talk with her. Yoshihiro Kamegai, a former junior middleweight contender and now a good commentator, visited her recently with a picture and a letter, bringing a peaceful smile to her face. The envelope was addressed: "Dear Grandma."

Miss Nagano dedicated her life to boxing with no time to build her own family, but she is survived by a lot of loving children and grandchildren. She is Japan's one and only holy mother of ringside. May her soul rest in peace. RING

stc tv: A Knockout Punch for Sports Fans in Saudi Arabia

The roar of the crowd, the clash of titans, the thrill of victory - the atmosphere at boxing events in Saudi Arabia is electric, with passionate fans creating an unforgettable experience. The recent rematch between Oleksandr Usyk and Tyson Fury in Riyadh captivated millions of viewers across the MENA region as Usyk secured victory by unanimous decision. But what if you couldn't make it to the arena? What if life's jabs and uppercuts kept you from catching the live action? Enter stc tv, the platform that's bringing the world of sports directly to Saudi homes, with the speed and precision of a championship boxer.

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stc went beyond mainstream sports by featuring dedicated esports channels, "stc tv EWC Legends" (Arabic) and "stc tv EWC" (English). These channels provided extensive coverage of the Esports World Cup 2024, including a weekly analysis show with local esports experts throughout the 8-week inaugural event. For fans of the Saudi Pro League, stc tv offers weekly highlight programs, keeping them up to date on all the action. By streaming these growing industries on stc tv, fans across the kingdom can support their favorite players and games wherever they are.

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FROM THE ARCHIVE

A Holy War:

While former heavyweight king George Foreman was initially mocked for returning to boxing following a 10-year layoff, the legendary Texan power-puncher posted 24 straight wins and was considered a legitimate threat by the time he faced undisputed champion Evander Holyfield in April 1991. While Holyfield, 28, was undefeated and 14 years younger, the Atlanta-based warrior had moved up from cruiserweight and was almost 50 pounds lighter than his opponent. Sound familiar? Holyfield, like Usyk did against Fury, used his speed and smarts to offset the size and strength of the bigger man to claim a hard-fought 12-round decision in Atlantic City.

FIGHTLINE

Fights only last a matter of minutes, but fighters are connected to each other by chains that extend for decades – even centuries – into the past. Their bond is a lineage built face-to-face – a young prospect struggles with the skills of an aging veteran whose nose was once broken by a fighter now enshrined in the International Boxing Hall of Fame. In that way, muscle memory carries knowledge and boxers face a piece of everyone their opponent has fought, everyone those people fought, and so on.

This month we're linking Sugar Ray Robinson, arguably the greatest fighter of all time, to Terence Crawford, a generational talent who will try to add his name to the GOAT conversation with a proposed September showdown against Canelo Alvarez. There are multiple paths linking the fierce American stylists whose primes are separated by well over half a century, but we've selected the nine-boxer Fightline above. There's at least one way to get there faster. Can you find it?

If so, or if you have another Fightline you'd like to submit, send it to comeoutwriting@gmail.com. And remember, some fighters can be linked on paper by jumping forward and backward in time, but to be a true lineage the fights must come in chronological order.

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